DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 428 839 PS 027 379

AUTHOR Holtz, Barry W.
TITLE Early Childhood Jewish Education. The Best Practices Project in Jewish Education. Second Edition.
INSTITUTION Council for Initiatives in Jewish Education, New York, NY.
SPONS AGENCY Mandel Foundation, New York, NY.
PUB DATE 1996-00-00
NOTE 109p.
PUB TYPE Books (010) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC05 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Early Childhood Education; *Jews; *Judaism; *Parochial Schools; Preschool Education; Program Descriptions; *Religious Education
IDENTIFIERS Jewish Day Schools

ABSTRACT

This book contains short descriptions of early childhood Jewish education programs that conform to the definitions of Best Practice found in a "Guide to Best Practice in Early Childhood Jewish Education," which represents the wisdom of experts concerning what constitutes success in this area (provided in Appendix 1 of the book). Descriptions of eight schools and settings and four individual programs, based on brief observations of the schools or programs, are provided along with recommendations for future best practices research, an overview of early childhood Jewish education, and suggestions for improving these programs. A list of the consultants and research team members is provided in Appendix 2. (JPB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 428 839

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

The BEST PRACTICES PROJECT
In Jewish Education

EARLY CHILDHOOD JEWISH EDUCATION

Barry W. Holtz
Project Director

PS 027879

CIJE Council for Initiatives in Jewish Education

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Barry W. Holtz
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
1

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

The Council for Initiatives in Jewish Education (CIJE)

Created in 1990 by the Commission on Jewish Education in North America, CIJE is an independent, non-profit organization dedicated to the revitalization of Jewish life through education. CIJE's mission, in its projects and research, is to be a catalyst for systemic educational reform by working in partnership with Jewish communities and organizations to build the profession of Jewish education and mobilize community support for Jewish education.

The Best Practices Project in Jewish Education

The CIJE Best Practices Project is designed to describe and analyze models of excellence in contemporary Jewish education. Through its research and documentation, the Project seeks to help improve practice in the range of settings in which Jewish education takes place.

Barry W. Holtz, Project Director

Other volumes available in the series:
Best Practices: Supplementary School Education
Best Practices: Jewish Education In JCCs

Design: Elizabeth A. Sheehan

The BEST PRACTICES PROJECT
In Jewish Education

EARLY CHILDHOOD JEWISH EDUCATION

Barry W. Holtz
Project Director

CIJE Council for Initiatives in Jewish Education

Copyright © 1993, 1996 by the Council for Initiatives in Jewish Education (CIJE)
15 East 26th Street, New York, NY 10010

All rights reserved.

Second edition

Introduction

What Is The Best Practices Project?
Barry W. Holtz 1

Appendix One: Guide to Best Practice 13

Appendix Two: Consultants and Research Team 16

Reports on Schools and Settings

Stephen S. Wise Temple Nursery School
Esther Elfenbaum 18

Germantown Jewish Centre: *Early Childhood Program*
Ruth Pinkenson Feldman 28

Jewish Primary Day School
Miriam Feinberg 36

Gan Hayeled Congregation Adas Israel Nursery School
Miriam Feinberg 42

Beth El Nursery School
Charlotte S. Muchnick 52

Chizuk Amuno Early Childhood Education Center
Rena Rotenberg 62

92nd Street Y Nursery School
Roanna Shorofsky 70

Moriah Child Care Center
Diana Ganger 76

Reports on Individual Programs

Infant/Parent Program of Gan Shalom
Marvell Ginsberg 80

Integrating Parents into Early Childhood Education
Marvell Ginsburg 84

Early Childhood Institute of the Boston Hebrew College:
Ina S. Regosin 92

My Jewish Discovery Place of the JCCA/Los Angeles
Esther Netter 104

WHAT IS THE BEST PRACTICES PROJECT?

In describing its "blueprint for the future," *A Time to Act*, the report of the Commission on Jewish Education in North America, called for the creation of "an inventory of best educational practices in North America."[1] The primary purpose of this inventory was to aid the Council for Initiatives in Jewish Education (CIJE) in its work as a "catalyst for change" for North American Jewish education. This recommendation of the Commission led to the creation of the CIJE Best Practices Project.

Along with its contribution to the work of CIJE, the Best Practices Project can be seen as a research effort that can make an important contribution to the knowledge base about North American Jewish education by documenting outstanding educational work that is currently taking place.

What do we mean by "best practice"? One recent book about this concept in the world of general education states that it is a phrase borrowed

> from the professions of medicine and law, where "good practice" or "best practice" are everyday phrases used to describe solid, reputable, state-of-the-art work in a field. If a doctor, for example, does not follow contemporary standards and a case turns out badly, peers may criticize his decisions and treatments by saying something like, "that was simply not best practice.". . . [I]f educators are people who take ideas seriously, who believe in inquiry, and who subscribe to the possibility of human progress, then our professional language must label and respect practice which is at the leading edge of the field.[2]

It is important, however, to be cautious about what we mean by the word "best." The contemporary literature in general education points out that seeking perfection when we examine educational endeavors will offer us little assistance as we try to improve actual work in the field. In an enterprise as complex and multifaceted as education, these writers argue, we should be looking for "good" not ideal practice.

Outstanding examples of educational practice certainly have their weaknesses and do not succeed in all their goals, but they do have the strength to recognize those weaknesses and the will to keep working at getting better. In seeking "good" educational practice, then, we hope to identify models of excellence for Jewish education. In other words we are looking to document the "success stories" of contemporary Jewish education.

In having such a best practices resource, CIJE would be able to offer both encouragement and program assistance to those asking for advice. The encouragement would come through the knowledge that good practice does exist in many aspects of Jewish education. In addition, by viewing the

Best Practice of "X" in one location, another community could receive programmatic assistance by seeing a living example of how "X" might be implemented in its own setting.

The effective practical use of the Best Practices Project is a complex matter, however. Knowing that a best practice exists in one place, and even seeing that program in action, does not guarantee that the other communities will be able to implement it in their localities, no matter how good their intentions.[3]

What makes a curriculum, supplementary school, or early childhood program work in Denver or Cleveland is related to a multitude of factors that may not be in place when those ideas are introduced in places such as Atlanta, Baltimore or Milwaukee (CIJE's original Lead Communities, laboratory sites for Jewish educational reform). The *translation* from the Best Practice site to another site will require considerable imagination. At the end of this introduction I will indicate some ways that such translations may occur.

Of course there is no such thing as "best practice" in the abstract, there is only best practice of "X" particularity: the supplementary school, JCC, curriculum for teaching Israel, etc. The first problem that the Best Practices Project had to face was defining the *areas* that the inventory should have as its categories. Thus we could have cut into the problem in a number of different ways. We might, for example, have looked at some of the sites in which Jewish education takes place such as:

- Synagogues
- Day schools
- Trips to Israel
- JCCs

Or we could have focused on some of the subject areas that are taught in such sites:

- Bible
- Hebrew
- Israel

Or we could have looked at the specific populations served:

- Adults
- Children
- Retired people

There were numerous other possibilities as well.

Our decision was to focus on the *venues in which Jewish education is conducted*. Eight different areas were identified:

- Supplementary schools
- Early childhood programs
- JCCs and Ys
- Day schools
- The Israel experience
- College campus programming
- Camping/youth programs
- Adult education.

Obviously there are other areas that could have been included and there were other ways of organizing the project. For example, we could have identified Family Education as a separate area, but we chose to include it *within* the relevant areas above— i.e. family education programs connected to synagogue schools, day schools, JCCs, etc. We later chose to add a ninth area, professional development programs, and as the project evolves, it is likely that other areas for research will be added to the original list.

Best Practice in Early Childhood Jewish Education: *The Process*

The first area that the Best Practices Project chose to explore was the supplementary school. The volume on that area was published by CIJE in February, 1993. While the research for that volume was in progress, we launched the second area, covered in this volume, Early Childhood Jewish Education. The method that we followed was very similar to our work on the supplementary school: A group of experts was gathered to discuss the issue of best practice in Early Childhood Jewish Education. (The list of names appears in Appendix Two of this introduction.) On the basis of that meeting and other consultations, we developed a Guide to Best Practice in Early Childhood Jewish Education (see Appendix One), which represented the wisdom of experts concerning what constituted success in this area. We did not expect to find schools that "scored high" on *every* measure in the Guide, but the Guide was to be used as a kind of outline or checklist for writing reports.

A team of report writers was assembled and given the following assignment: using the Guide to Best Practice in Early Childhood Jewish Education, locate good settings or successful individual programs either within those settings (stand alone programs such as a parent education program) or separate from them (such as the report on the Professional Development Program of the Boston Hebrew College, included in this volume). The researchers were asked to write short, descriptive reports for inclusion in this volume.

We believed that working in this fashion, we would be likely to get reliable results in a reasonable amount of time. We also knew from the outset that the Best Practices Project was created to fulfill a pressing need for assistance that both the field of Jewish education and the leadership of North American Jewry agree must be met. We did not have the luxury to create a research project whose results would not be available for many years.

The model that we employed relies on the informed opinion of expert observers. The reports that our researchers wrote were based on a relatively short amount of time spent in observing the particular schools or the individual programs—although all of the researchers had had some previous knowledge (sometimes quite extensive) about the school or program being studied. To facilitate the process, the researchers had some familiarity with the places they were looking at and could use that prior knowledge to move the process along quickly. We also asked one school director to write up her own personal view about the program she runs, a setting generally agreed to be a successful example of Early Childhood Jewish Education.

Next Steps for Best Practice Research

It is important to remember that CIJE has always viewed the Best Practices Project as an enterprise with important long-range implications. We believe that these reports can offer serious assistance to communities seeking to improve the quality of Jewish education in North America, but we also know that more work can and should be done. We view the reports included in the present volume as the first "iteration," in the language of social science researchers—the first step in a process that needs to evolve over time.

How might that research develop? We can see two ways: first, the research can broaden. We have included only a handful of examples in this report. The simple fact is we have no idea how many successful Early Childhood Jewish Education programs are currently operating in North America. We have certainly heard enough *bad* news about Jewish education over the past 25 years, but we have heard very little about the success stories. It is possible that the number is small; even if that is true, however, this Early Childhood Jewish Education volume has touched only a few examples. One interesting result of the publication of the volume on supplementary schools was that I as Project Director began to hear from a number of people in the Jewish education profession who had suggestions of examples to include in our next edition! The very fact of the Best Practices Project had led people to start thinking along these lines. I suspect that this volume will also inspire people to suggest new examples in the Early Childhood Jewish Education area.

A second way of expanding the research in Early Childhood Jewish Education area would be increasing the depth of the reports. In reports this short it is impossible to get more than a basic description of the program and feel for the flavor of the institution. What needs to be added is the detail and elucidation that a longer report would allow. I have elsewhere called this the difference between writing a "report" and writing a "portrait" or study of an institution.[4] As further iterations of the Early Childhood Jewish Education volume develop, we would like to see more in-depth portraits of educators, schools, and programs. For example, one possibility that has been suggested is a set of "educational biographies" or autobiographies of outstanding Jewish educators from the best practice sites to try to learn how they came to be the educational leaders that they are.[5] Another possibility is in-depth interviews that would lead to careful, almost step-by step presentations describing the process of implementing innovation into these best practice locations. Such a document could help teach other places how to implement change.

The Reports on Early Childhood Jewish Education: *An Overview*

Early Childhood Jewish Education takes place in a number of different settings—synagogues, day schools, Jewish community centers and Ys. Some places offer intensive, day-long programs that meet five days a week. Other programs can be as short as a weekly 45-minute session for infants and their parents. In addition some central agencies (e.g., Boards of Jewish Education) offer their own programs or direct assistance to local programs.

Early Childhood Jewish Education is a complex area whose importance has grown in recent years. Partially thanks to the phenomenon of families with two parents working, the need for programs for young children—whether that be child care, day care, or educationally oriented settings—has increased remarkably. Many parents have turned to Jewish institutions such as community centers and synagogues to help answer their needs. In some cases—perhaps even *many* cases—these are parents who may not themselves be very involved in Jewish life but for a variety of reasons have turned to a Jewish institution for assistance. (One area of research that would be worthwhile exploring is the motivation of parents in choosing Jewish settings for early childhood education.)

One of the important dimensions of Early Childhood Jewish Education—something that our best practice reports confirm—is that this area of Jewish education appears to be one of those windows of opportunity" for Jewish identification that a number of researchers have spoken about in recent years.[6] The impact of Early Childhood Jewish Education on the family, not just on the child, is one of the key arguments for an emphasis on this type of Jewish education. Studies seem to indi-

cate that engagement with the right kind of Early Childhood Jewish Education program can have a significant impact on the Jewish identities of the adults in the family and on the Jewish behaviors in the home.[7] Hence the reader will find a very strong emphasis on family involvement in the reports in this volume.

Of course, the primary importance of Early Childhood Jewish Education is its effect on the child, and here we are dealing with two different but related issues. *First, a best practice early childhood program must conform to the standards of excellence found in the general field.* These programs need to have the level of physical and psychological safety, educational sophistication, and qualified personnel that one would find in any program offered in a public or private school or any nonsectarian setting. Early childhood educators use the phrase "developmentally appropriate" education as a key aspect of an outstanding program at this age level. One extremely encouraging finding is the sense that the good programs here stack up well against virtually anything that one can find in the general field—something that we cannot say about every other dimension of Jewish education across the board!

Second, a best practice early childhood program must contribute something significant in its Jewish dimension. Such a contribution may be in its ability to adapt the best of early childhood general education to a Jewish setting; it may be its use of Jewish symbols, stories, and activities, its skills in communicating Jewish values and attitudes. It may be the sense of Jewish community it creates and its influence on the child's interests. The best practice programs in this volume are all making important contributions in these arenas.

Early Childhood Jewish Education, however, suffers from its own unique set of difficulties which the best practice sites have worked hard to overcome. First, and perhaps most important, this area of Jewish education has received little attention and support from the leadership of the community. Programs have often been viewed as acceptable only if they are "financially self-sustaining," a standard that we do not apply to other areas of Jewish education. The potential impact of this kind of education, both on children and families, needs to be recognized.

One of the results of this lack of support is that there is no area of Jewish education in which salaries are as low as in Early Childhood Jewish Education. Even compared with supplementary school teachers, the salaries are small. This low salary scale is certainly connected to the staffing demands in this area of education— the rule of thumb is "the younger the child, the smaller the teacher-student ratio required." Hence early childhood programs are costly because they tend to need greater numbers of teachers or assistants. But the lack of respect for the field is also an important factor in the low salaries. What the best practice sites show, however, is that "the younger the child, the more crucial is competence in the teacher"!

It is difficult to find good staff for this area. And the more "Jewish" one wants the program to be, the more difficult it is to find teachers. The CIJE Study of Educators found that early childhood teachers in the three communities in which the study was conducted had the weakest Jewish background and training among the educators surveyed. For example, 55% of the early childhood teachers had received no Jewish education after the age of 13, 22% had received no Jewish education before the age of 13 and only 15% had received a day school education before the age of 13. By contrast, 29% of supplementary school had received no Jewish education after age 13; 11% had received no Jewish education before age 13; and 24% were day school graduates.[8]

This is the only area of Jewish education (excepting general studies teachers in day schools) in which one finds significant numbers of non-Jewish personnel in a professional role. Moreover, the great interest in Early Childhood Jewish Education in recent years has led to an even greater demand on the system to find competent teachers with Jewish knowledge.

There is still a good deal that we must learn about this area. We need to know, for example, the best ways to improve the quality of teachers in pre-service training programs (of which there are almost none available) and in in-service education, both Judaically and in the skills of early childhood education. We need to find ways to enrich the curriculum of these schools in more profound ways and to build deeper connections between families and the organized Jewish community.

The best practice settings described in the present volume give us hope. They assure us that there are excellent practitioners currently out in the field. There are sites that can be used for inspiration and guidance. And there is recognition by some farsighted communal leaders, rabbis, and educators that Early Childhood Jewish Education is an opportunity to influence future generations, both children and their parents.

Improving Early Childhood Jewish Education: *Some Practical Suggestions*

It is obvious from these first explorations that there are numerous ways in which Early Childhood Jewish Education could be improved using the Best Practices Project. The following suggestions are by no means exhaustive, but they represent ways that individual schools or groups of schools within a community could begin to work for change.

1. *Use the Guide*

A good place to start is with the "Guide for Looking at Best Practice in Early Childhood Jewish Education" (see Appendix One). Even though it was designed for use by experts with considerable experience as early childhood observers and it was not intended to be an exhaustive "evaluation

tool," nonetheless the Guide offers the opportunity for both professionals and laypeople within an institution to begin a conversation about the strengths and weaknesses of their school. Obviously, insiders will have the disadvantage of less objectivity than outside observers, but on the positive side they also have much more information and a deeper sense of the real workings of the school. Using the Guide is a good way to start thinking about the directions that Early Childhood Jewish Education could and should be taking.

2. *Personnel Is the Key*

The Teacher

One can easily make the case that there is no place in Jewish education where personnel matters more than in Early Childhood Jewish Education. The teachers' influence on young children is comparable to virtually no other area in Jewish education (with the possible exception of the *potential* influence of youth leaders on teenagers). What characterizes the best practice sites are dedicated teachers who tend to stay in place. This is a field that generally sees a tremendous amount of turnover in teaching staff, probably the most in Jewish education. The best practice places manage to hold on to their teachers—through a tremendous amount of nurturing, gestures of appreciation (dinners, publicity, etc.), and doing the best they can for them monetarily.

Generally teachers in the world of Early Childhood Jewish Education break down into two groups: those with training and experience in contemporary approaches to early childhood education on the one hand, and those with strong Judaic knowledge, background and practice on the other. The best practice sites tend to have more teachers who have *both* dimensions of expertise, but even in those outstanding settings the combination is not easy to find.

Providing in-service education both improves the quality of staff and helps retain teachers by showing concern for the teachers' professionalism. The best practice sites accomplish this through outside expertise (often through the local BJE if it has an early childhood specialist), by providing membership in the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), and by offering opportunities for teachers to attend the NAEYC annual conference. Programs such as the Boston Hebrew College program described in this volume are an important effort to increase the Judaic knowledge of early childhood educators.

One interesting discovery from our research on Early Childhood Jewish Education is that we found more *direct supervision of teaching* by the program's director than one sees in other areas of Jewish education. The directors of these programs spend a good deal of time watching their teachers interact with children and working with the teachers to improve practice. Hence the truism that obtains in all aspects of education is even more important in the early childhood realm:

The Educational Leader: A Crucial Element

The best practice sites show that the directors of early childhood programs need to have a wide range of competencies. They need expertise in the latest educational developments in the early childhood field; they need Jewish knowledge and commitments; they need skills of supervision; and they need to have the ability to work with both children and their families. All that must be combined with the political savvy to operate well within a larger institution such as a synagogue, day school, or JCC and build support within that community. Investing in the ongoing education and training of these leaders should be a high priority for any community wishing to improve its system of Early Childhood Jewish Education.

3. *Programs Need a Supportive Base*

For Early Childhood Jewish Education to succeed, programs need to find the right "home" in the larger institutions mentioned above. For that to happen, the leadership of synagogues, day schools, and JCCs must understand the importance of Early Childhood Jewish Education and what is involved in making such programs work. One sees in the best practice sites rabbis, principals, and JCC directors who understand the role of these programs in influencing the lives of families and doing outreach for the larger institution.

4. *Developmentally Appropriate Education Is Crucial*

At the heart of good Early Childhood Jewish Education is an approach to learning based in contemporary knowledge about children. As I have said above, insiders in the field refer to this approach as "developmentally appropriate education." The approach recognizes the unique qualities of young children, focuses on play as a way of learning, and sees the "experiential" as the key to early childhood education. All of the best practice sites display various modes of developmentally appropriate education, all have learned a great deal from the world of general education and have adapted what they have learned to the Jewish setting. The individual programs detailed in the reports— such as the JCCA's "My Jewish Discovery Place" in Los Angeles or the infant programs at Gan Shalom in Chicago— show similar influences from the best of contemporary educational thinking about young children.

At times specific approaches from general education are mentioned in the reports. For example, one method mentioned in the best practice write-ups in this volume is the "Bank Street Approach," named after the famed school of education in New York which, among other things, prepares teachers for early childhood education. The Bank Street Approach has been adapted to Jewish educational settings. Still it remains at heart a child-centered, program, which

> organizes its thinking about educational goals in terms of developmental processes. It views the school as a psychological field, as a continuing environmental force that is capable of shaping the psychological development of children. Educational objectives are defined in terms of psychological well-being and competence, in relation to the degree to which they enhance development and foster coping skills and ego strength. . . .
>
> The focus is on the meaningfulness, continuity, and cognitive depth of the educational experience rather than on the achievement of specific academic goals.[9]

Another approach that appears in some of the reports is High/Scope, as adapted to Jewish settings. High/Scope is a curriculum for early childhood schools which developed in the late 1960s and has continued to evolve over time. It

> views children as *active learners*, who learn best from activities that they themselves plan, carry out, and reflect upon. Adults observe, support, and extend the play of the child as appropriate. Adults arrange interest areas in the learning environment; maintain a daily routine that permits children to plan, carry out, and reflect on their own activities; and join in children's activities, asking questions that extend children's plans and help them think. The adults encourage children to engage in key experiences that help them learn to make choices, solve problems, and otherwise engage in activities that contribute to their intellectual, social and physical development.[10]

The reader will see examples of programs (such as Gan Hayeled and Stephen S. Wise Temple) that have used this approach in a Jewish setting.

5. *The Family Is Important*

Although the role of the family in Jewish education is a topic widely discussed—though with little unanimity of definition—its situation in contemporary Early Childhood Jewish Education has special relevance. The best practice reports indicate three different elements of the role of the family in Early Childhood Jewish Education. First, as we see in other areas of Jewish education, the support of the family can influence children in a positive way concerning their relationship to Judaism, Jewish practice and values. By working with the family, educators increase their chances of success and magnify their influence on the child.

In Early Childhood Jewish Education, however, a second element plays an important role: *children can influence the family*. With the child's first exposure to "formal" Jewish learning (even in a highly informal setting!), children may move parents to start thinking about their own relationship to the Jewish community, to Jewish religious practice (such as Shabbat celebration), and to other aspects of Jewish life. Hence the best practice sites place a good deal of emphasis on involvement of the family—whether that be in the co-op arrangement of Beth El Nursery School, the parental involvement at the Germantown Jewish Centre, the outreach activities of the 92nd Street Y, or the ongoing workshops offered at places like Chizuk Amuno.

In many places the early childhood program becomes a mini-community for families that endures after the children have graduated from the program. Most of the best practice sites talk about the need to create a supportive community in which parents do not feel intimidated, but welcome. For those parents who themselves have weak Jewish backgrounds or little connection to the organized Jewish community, an inviting and supportive environment can pave the way to greater Jewish involvement. Hence the best practice sites show a third relationship to family: the opportunity to see the early childhood program as a feeder to the larger institution in which the program is housed, particularly the synagogue.

Local Communities and the Implementation of Best Practices

In what way can the Best Practices Project directly assist local communities? We see three immediate uses of the project: knowledge, study, and adaptation. First, the Best Practices Project offers "existence proofs" for the successful Early Childhood Jewish Education program, knowledge that such places actually exist.

Beyond merely knowing that such programs exist, we can use the best practice reports as models that can be studied. These programs "work" and they work in a variety of ways. Professor Seymour Fox has often spoken about the Best Practices Project as creating the "curriculum" for change in communities. This should include: exploration of the particular schools and programs through study of the reports, meetings with the researchers who wrote them up and the educators who run those schools, as well as visits to the best practice sites.

Finally, it is crucial to think hard about adapting the best practice sites to the specific characteristics of local communities. It is unlikely that a program that exists in one place can simply be "injected" into a community. What must happen is a process of analysis, adaptation, revision, and evaluation. The Best Practices Project gives us the framework to begin the discussion, explore new possibilities, and strive for excellence.

From Best Practice to New Practice

Best practice is only one element in the improvement of Jewish education. Even those programs that work can be improved. And other ideas as yet untried need to be experimented with as well. CIJE's work with communities allows us a chance to go beyond best practices in order to develop *new ideas* in Jewish education. At times we have referred to this aspect as the "department of

dreams." Within this department reside all the new ideas in Jewish education that might be imagined, along with the ideas that people have talked about, perhaps even written about for years, but never have had the chance to try out. Contemporary Jewish education has been given the challenge to dream those dreams and imagine those new ideas. As we learn from the best of what works today, we must also envision new directions for Jewish education in the coming century.

Please note: In the volume on Supplementary Schools all the names of institutions were changed and replaced with pseudonyms. After publication many people suggested that I give the actual names of places and programs. What the reader finds in this volume are the real names. I have also eliminated the one page summaries from the format of this volume, since it felt repetitive to have such summaries preceding such short reports. I have retained the "cover sheet" as an easy reference point for readers.

Special thanks: To Dr. Shulamith Elster, who worked as a close partner on this project and whose insight and organizational skills were indispensable to its implementation. And to Dr. Miriam Feinberg—from the Board of Jewish Education of Greater Washington—whose knowledge of the field of Early Childhood Jewish Education helped us develop the working group of experts that put this project together.

Notes

1. Commission on Jewish Education in North America, *A Time to Act* (University Press of America, 1991), p. 69.

2. Steven Zemelman, Harvey Daniels, and Arthur Hyde, *Best Practice* (Heinemann, 1993), pp. vii-viii.

3. See Barry W. Holtz, "Best Practice and the Challenge of Replication," *The Melton Journal* no. 28 (Fall/Summer, 1994).

4. The most well-known example of the "portrait" approach is Sara Lawrence Lightfoot's book *The Good High School* (Basic Books, 1983).

5. The *"Archive of Educational Biography"* at Michigan State University might offer a model for this kind of work.

6. See Perry London and Barry Chazan, *Psychology and Jewish Identity Education* (American Jewish Committee, 1990), p. 18.

7. See two publications: a) Ruth Ravid and Marvell Ginsburg, *"The Effect of Jewish Early Childhood Education on Jewish Home Practice,"* Jewish Education, vol. 53, no. 3, Fall 1985; b) Ruth Pinkenson Feldman, *The Impact of Jewish Day Care Experiences on Parental Jewish Identity* (American Jewish Committee, 1988). Marvell Ginsburg and Ruth Pinkenson Feldman have both contributed reports for our current best practices volume.

8. See *Policy Brief: Background and Professional Training of Teachers in Jewish Schools* (CIJE, 1994).

9. Herbert Zimilies, "The Bank Street Approach," in *Approaches to Early Childhood Education*, 2nd ed., edited by Jaipaul L. Roopnarine and James E. Johnson (Merrill/Macmillan, 1993), p. 264.

10. David P. Weikart and Lawrence J. Schweinhart, "The High/Scope Curriculum for Early Childhood Care and Education," in *Approaches to Early Childhood Education*, p. 195.

A "best practice" site should be a place...:

I. System and Site

a. ....with a clearly defined philosophy of early childhood education and early childhood Jewish education.

What are the goals and by what means are they articulated? How does the place communicate with its public? Through meetings? Publications?

How does the place handle the issue of recruitment? Is it particularly effective in this area and how does recruitment operate?

b. ....with strong parental involvement.

How is this implemented?

By parental involvement in the governance of the school?

By actual parental involvement in the program's activities?

By family education activities?

By discussion of goals?

By ongoing communication between the program and home?

Do the parents understand the nature of the school's curriculum?

c. ....where parents feel welcome and not "threatened."

Describe any specific activities.

Does the school do anything to deal with the issue of intermarried families?

d. ...with involvement in the local community, particularly the synagogue(s)

How is this implemented? Do the children participate in communal activities like tzedakah projects or Israel-related events?

Do local rabbis and Jewish leaders have contact with the program? Are they invited in?

Do the rabbis see the program as a benefit for their institutions?

e. ...where the school/program itself becomes a kind of community or family.

How is this seen in the program?

What means are used to accomplish this?

f. ...with a safe and inviting physical environment.

Describe what this looks like.

Do you know that this is a Jewish place from its physical setting?

g. ....where the children go on to further Jewish education, either formal or informal.

Does the school have actual data about this?

What is the impact of the program on the individual family?

On the community itself?

What are the linkages to other Jewish institutions?

h. ....where one feels good to be there and students enjoy being there.

In what way do you see this attitude?

What is the atmosphere in the place?

II. The Educational Program

a. ....with an educationally appropriate environment.

Describe what this looks like.

b. ...with an appropriate "Jewish environment."

Describe what this looks like.

c. ....with a developmentally appropriate educational practice in an "emotionally safe" environment.

d. ....with a clear and articulated curriculum.

Does one see:

–language-rich experiences?

–integration of content and play?

–integration of Jewish and general content?

–use of the arts?

–specific themes?

e. ....with an emphasis on teaching good values, on teaching Jewish values.

How is this teaching done? Is there a written curriculum?

f. .... in which the program is involved in ongoing self-evaluation.

How is this done? Do we have anything written?

III. Staff and Supervision

a. ....with good teachers who exhibit a high degree of professionalism.

b. ....who are good Jewish role models.

Who are the teachers? What is their training and educational background?

What is their Jewish educational background and preparation? What is their relationship to the students?

What is the stability of the staff over time?

What does the school do to help new teachers enter the school?

Does the school use non-Jewish teachers? How does it deal with that issue?

c. ....which has a strong professional development program in place.

What does the school do to encourage professional development? Do teachers receive encouragement through salary incentives? Does the school pay for teachers to attend professional development programs?

Does the school engage in regular, serious in-service education for the teachers?

Does the school do supervision of teachers?

Who does the supervision?

What is it like? How regular is it?

Does the school use outside consultants for in-service?

Are teachers sent to in-service sessions or professional conferences? Where and in what way do these take place? Is there a retreat or shabbaton program for teachers?

d. ....which values the teachers and deals well with issues of morale, status, and salary.

How does the school boost staff morale?

How does it retain staff?

Are the teachers paid well?

How does the school handle issues of salary and benefits?

e. ...with an effective director who serves as a true educational leader..

In what way does the director demonstrate this leadership? How do the teachers,...the parents,...the rabbi perceive her or him?

IV. Specific Educational Programs in Place

Describe if the school uses particular early childhood educational programs and in what way are they effective. For example:

Whole language approach

Montessori

Bank Street

Cooperative learning

High scope

etc.

Describe any interesting approaches to specific Jewish content areas. For example:

Teaching Bible

Hebrew

Israel

Jewish living and practice

Tzedakah

etc.

Lucy Cohen
(Jewish People's School and Peretz School, Montreal)

Esther Elfenbaum *(BJE, Los Angeles)*

Miriam Feinberg *(BJE, Washington, DC)*

Ruth Pinkenson Feldman *(BJE, Philadelphia)*

Esther Friedman *(The Hebrew Academy, Houston)*

Marvell Ginsburg *(BJE, Chicago)*

Shulamit Gittelson
(Beth Torah Adath Yeshurun, North Miami Beach)

Charlotte Muchnick
(Solomon Schechter School, Philadelphia)

Jane Perman *(JCC Association, New York)*

Ina Regosin *(MAJE, Milwaukee)*

Rena Rotenberg *(BJE, Baltimore)*

Roanna Shorofsky
(Abraham Joshua Heschel School, New York)

Shulamith Elster, *(CIJE, ex officio)*

Barry W. Holtz *(CIJE, ex officio)*

REPORTS ON SCHOOLS AND SETTINGS

Stephen S. Wise Temple Nursery School

INFO SHEET

Report By:
Esther Elfenbaum

Date:
December 3, 1992

Type of Setting:
Synagogue-based
Nursery, Pre-K

Name of the Setting:
Stephen S. Wise Temple

Address:
16100 Mulholland Drive
Los Angeles, CA 90049

Denominational Affiliation:
Reform

Contact Person at Setting:
Dafna Presnell

Position:
Director

Approximate Number of Students:
400

From Ages:
2½ to 5

Number of Teachers: 60

What particular emphases of this school are worth noting:
Parent involvement;
High Scope integration

Introduction

Situated amidst the beauty of the Santa Monica mountains, Stephen S. Wise Temple Nursery School is a dynamic institution composed of 60 teachers and 400 children and their parents. The site, located mid-point between valley and city of sprawling Los Angeles, evokes a sense of the spiritual along with being a center for learning and community. The pre-K site in particular, nestled among lush green hills, gives one a feeling of the tranquility and peace that is difficult to find in the traffic and noise of the metropolis that is Los Angeles. This site, which opened in 1991, was specifically designed for pre-K by its multitalented director Dafna Presnell.

When one enters the gates to the school, one cannot help but be impressed with the landscape of children's smiling faces in the garden and on the shiny play equipment. One sees the enthusiasm of the carefully selected teachers and the interest of the parents who are opening the gates while bringing their children to school.

Upon entering the classroom, one sees that the environment has captured the imagination of teacher and child alike. Rooms have been transformed into succahs, corners for Judaic exploration, as we see a handmade tallit, beautiful candlesticks and hallot against a backdrop of children's murals and mobiles. Planning boards adorn the walls so that children can choose from the learning environment carefully prepared by the teachers. Lofts in each pre-K classroom provide both an escape and a place to dramatize the themes and topics introduced to the children. Today the loft is being used as a make-believe succah as children hang chains and eat their lunches inside.

The unique curriculum, developed by Dafna Presnell and a committee of teachers, reflects the school philosophy and is based on the High Scope model of a "prepared environment," choices by the children and support and extension of learning through teacher interaction.

As election fever grips the country – - this report was written in the fall of 1992 — so too the pre-K classes at S. S. Wise are introduced to politics. Each classroom votes and participates in the political process in its own way. Some classes have voting booths with color-coded markers; others vote by recognition of the three candidates by simply raising their hands in support for a particular candidate. In all the classrooms there is a discussion of issues and some fascinating viewpoints of what a president does. There are balloons in red, white, and blue, and as a culminating activity the children make cupcakes to celebrate the election results.

On any given day that someone might view the school, the visitor would know that one is observing a very special program — always vibrant, dynamic, and creative.

Philosophy

S.S. Wise's philosophical statement lets the community know that

> this religious and cultural program affords children the opportunity to observe and participate in Jewish customs, rituals, and holiday observances so that they can develop their identities as American Jews who are connected with Jews in Israel and throughout the world.... The goals of the school focus on the development of the total child. The educational program strives to support, stimulate, and guide the

> growth of the child in each developmental area: emotional, social, physical, creative, cognitive, spiritual, and Jewish ...

The school's philosophy and curriculum are based on the notion that children pass through a number of relatively predictable stages in their growth. The school is concerned with staff development and parent education as well. Communication of the philosophy and goals occurs through parent meetings, Back-to-school nights, bimonthly newsletters, and orientations. Parents are given packets that describe the curriculum and school philosophy and procedures. Parent educational sessions, during which there are informal discussions, help clarify goals and procedures. Parents also attend two parent conferences, numerous holiday celebrations, a school picnic, and arts and crafts festivities.

Recruitment

Recruitment of students occurs by word-of-mouth only. Since the school began 25 years ago with 17 students, it has expanded to 400 students from nursery to pre-K and has a three-year waiting list. Membership at the temple, a prerequisite for acceptance to the program, is on a sliding scale. The S. S. Wise Parenting Center, for parents of infants and toddlers, is a natural source of new students. The director goes there to articulate to parents the philosophy and goals of the nursery school. The temple also includes the nursery school in its brochure and literature.

Parent Involvement

Strong parental involvement is a trademark of the S. S. Wise Nursery School. It serves as an entry point to involvement on the temple board. There is a Parent Committee that serves as a support system. This committee works on family education, holiday workshop series, family picnics, the arts and crafts festival and all holiday celebrations. The committee also plans for Shabbat services for the nursery and pre-K school.

A program of special interest to the community is the school's Mitzvah Project, which will be discussed in detail later in this report.

There are sequential opportunities for the parents to be involved, from back-to-school night in October to open house in February, where they experience a simulation of their child's daily routine.

A buddy system designed to make parents feel at home begins prior to September — new parents get a welcome call from a parent already in the school. The school's welcoming policy toward intermarried families has helped draw the non-Jewish parent closer to conversion. The school's director explains: "If a child is involved in our school and the parent is immersed in its activities, the commitment to raise a Jewish child increases. Many of these children (70%) continue into the day school. Parents become immersed in curriculum and opportunities for involvement. We invest in memory banks. It is education without a book. The parent owns the experience."

Special programs such as the December Dilemma attract large numbers of parents. It is designed for three diverse groups of parents: families with two Jewish parents, families having one parent who has converted to Judaism, and families having an interfaith marriage. Each group participates in its own special forum. Two of the rabbis and the school's director comprise the panel that deals with the issues related to each family type. Examples of issues for these forums include:

> Why don't we also celebrate Christmas?
>
> Why can't we share these holidays?
>
> Do I have to disconnect from my past?
> (converted family members)

There is also a workshop on God in which the rabbis respond to the parents' personal issues. The staff is always searching for ways to bring in parents — utilizing, for example, a school board meeting with its captive audience of 40-60 parents as an opportunity for education and discussion of Judaic issues. Holiday workshop series as well as other holiday preparation workshops are always offered to parents.

A very active social action committee is available to parents. "By modeling, I will teach my child Jewish values" is an important tenet of the committee. Of special importance to the school and exemplary for the Los Angeles community is the school's Mitzvah Project.

Mitzvah Committee

The Mitzvah Committee is highly structured, is well-organized, and creates a community within the school. The organization begins with the classroom, in which there is a Mitzvah mom or dad. Their duty is to obtain information from the teacher, parents, and administration office as to any difficult conditions or joyful situations that have come up in their classroom with regard to families.

In turn these parents coordinate with the vice president of the Teacher/Parent Association assigned to their unit. The vice presidents coordinate with their Mitzvah Committee chair, who sits on the temple board. In order to organize support for the families, there are written procedures. The school director is in constant communication with the vice president in order to ensure sensitivity and appropriateness in the handling of each situation. Gemilut Hasadim, such as shopping, visits to families, home-cooked meals during illness, are performed for the family. When there is a death in the family, the rabbi and director decide on what to do for the family. The Mitzvah Committee often has to help out during situations where there is a divorce. At no time does it get involved in interpersonal issues of the family. Its main function is to step in and give support where needed.

There is a budget underwritten by the Parent Association board as well as time contributed by individual parents. All situations are recorded in a journal format so that the director and vice president are aware of what's happening and can mobilize the 24-member committee very quickly.

Staff and Supervision

The S. S. Wise Nursery and pre-K school consists of a dynamic seasoned director, 4 assistant supervisors, and 60 teachers whose backgrounds range from the basic 12 units in Early Child Education to 50% with B.A.'s, and 10% with Master's degrees. There are also several M.S.W's. There is a very low turnover (about 10% per year, compared with the national average of 44%). "The low turnover," says the director, "is due in part to the excellent working environment." There are many perks such as subsidized Judaica classes, EC classes, and conclaves. Salaries meet the BJE salary scale. Classrooms are very well equipped and there is an abundance of materials.

The caring that is exhibited in the Mitzvah Committee permeates the school in the way staff is treated. There is a strong support system for teachers and a feeling that the staff is one large family. Birthdays and special events in teachers' lives are acknowledged and celebrated. Frequent staff meetings, staff celebrations, and get-togethers have the effect of unifying staff. For new teachers there is a preorientation, and contact is made with the future team over the summer. ESL is offered for English as a second language teachers. There is a rigorous interviewing process.

The director, who started the school with 17 students, is very astute in selecting a staff that is

motivated, energetic, knowledgeable, and dedicated. Teachers must be able to articulate a philosophical statement, a vision, and must view children from a developmental point of view. Most important they must be nurturing and have a suitable personality. Classroom management techniques must be well defined by the teacher. A professional dress code is observed.

The director, Dafna Presnell, has the qualities of strong leadership, sharp insight into human behavior, highly honed administrative skills, and excellent professional training, having been trained in both Israel and the United States. She commands respect of the temple board, rabbis, and teachers and parents alike. As the prime administrator, supervisor, and leader of the nursery school and pre-K, she coordinates the staff under a highly structured system of unit supervision, staff meetings, written policies, and opportunities for professional development.

The normal routine includes weekly staff meetings in large groups, twice-a-month team meetings, and once-a-month articulation meetings. These include in-service on styles of teaching, parent conferencing, and curriculum. Sometimes there are outside speakers on topics which teachers select. New teachers are encouraged to receive High Scope training as it can be integrated into the Judaic classroom through a course given by the BJE Early Childhood Education consultant at Hebrew Union College. Many of the teachers have taken the class in addition to receiving the school's High Scope oriented official curriculum.

Meetings are held after school hours, which are 9:30–3:30 for pre-K. Team meetings are held before school begins. Child care is available until 5:00 P.M. for those who need it, so teachers sometimes need to send one teacher from the team. In addition to subsidized classes, there is a yearly weekend conclave and shabbaton for the entire staff.

Daily supervision is given by three or four supervisors, who observe in the classrooms and interact in a supportive role. The team meetings deal with classroom issues and concerns relating to individual children. Formal documented supervision meetings take place once a year.

Staff morale is enhanced by the sunshine committee, staff parties, and the concern and caring shown by the director and supervisors. Teachers receive the benefit of temple membership (nonvoting) and can attend all programs free of charge as well as receive complementary High Holiday tickets. Full-time teachers receive 80% medical benefits. and dental benefits.

Specific Educational Programs

The entire school uses an integrated Judaic/High Scope approach in which themes are interwoven into the child's learning experiences. There is a specific curriculum which states goals, objectives. specific content areas, and suggested activities. The curriculum is set up on a continuum so that all of the children will learn the same content such as Sukkot. However, the skills and experiences will be age appropriate for each group of children. There is background information on the holiday for the teacher as well as a detailed list of outcomes, knowledge, and experiences in social, emotional, cognitive, and creative areas.

Teachers are encouraged to plan key experiences (as outlined in a High Scope framework) in the areas of classification, language, seriation, special relations, representation, time, and number. All the areas have one component in common — active learning. Activities that are designed for these experiences come from Judaic content areas — for example, a child might be asked to sequence the making of hallah by arranging three cards: (1) mix ingredients, (2) bake, (3) say the Motzi and eat.

For the key experience of learning numbers, a child might need to put one Hanukkah candle in each holder on a Hanukkah (one-to-one correspondence). All such activities are carefully planned and integrated so that the child is learning to appreciate Jewish symbols, customs, and holidays while developing his or her skills in basic areas such as classification, numbers, language, etc. Doing this requires very careful observation as to skills the child needs to develop. It requires careful planning of activities that have Judaic themes.

One of the finest components exhibited in the classroom is the teacher/child interaction. Teachers are constantly facilitating language and problem solving and extending children's learning. One will always see the teachers (who team teach) at the children's level, actively involved with the children. This involvement is vital to carrying out the objectives of a program that is on the opposite pole of laissez-faire yet allows for creativity, independence, and freedom. The teachers in this school are skilled enough to know where to find the fine line between support and interference.

Hebrew has been integrated into the curriculum through the use of centers and the Aleph program, a commercially available set of materials. Children are encouraged to help the less fortunate through the SOVA food pantry. Always there is discussion of Jewish values and modeling of those values by the staff. Israel is brought into the curriculum through holidays such as Yom Haatzmaut, Tu b'Shevat, and the stories and experiences of a number of the staff who are Israeli. Parents are encouraged to come to class and share souvenirs and artifacts. Appropriate Bible stories are told, read, and dramatized throughout the year in the pre-K classes.

Throughout the program a "whole language" approach is implemented. Children are frequent users of a well-stocked children's library. Children's language is recorded throughout the day as children share their thoughts with the teachers. Language is seen everywhere on bulletin boards, child-made story books, and children's artwork.

The S.S. Wise Nursery and Pre-K program seek to find the best in educational methodology in order to offer the best for each child. All of the curricula and methodology are constantly being scrutinized and evaluated in order to ensure that the staff and school are meeting the needs of individual children and their families.

The rabbis, the S. S. Wise school's education director, and the nursery school director meet to coordinate all of the programs so that the school philosophy and policies are uniform for all the students.

The level of dedication and commitment by the board, rabbis, staff, and parents has greatly contributed to the exemplary achievement of S. S. Wise Nursery and Pre-K Schools. This school serves as a model for the Los Angeles community and for other communities throughout the country.

Excerpts of the Materials from Stephen S. Wise Temple Nursery School

Philosophical Rationale: *Pre-K School*

The Pre-K School at Stephen S. Wise Temple seeks to provide a warm Jewish environment in which children can develop an intense feeling of pride in their heritage. This religious and cultural program affords children the opportunity to observe and participate in Jewish customs, rituals, and holiday observances so that they can develop their identities as American Jews who are connected with Jews in Israel and throughout the world. The values of Judaism, and of Reform Judaism in particular, permeate the school program.

The goals of the school focus on the development of the "total child." The educational program strives to support, stimulate, and guide the growth of the child in each of the following developmental areas: emotional, social, physical, creative, cognitive, spiritual, and Jewish.

The school's philosophy and curriculum are based on the notion that children pass through a number of relatively predictable stages in their growth. As the child interacts directly with peers, adults, and the objects and materials in the environment, she/he gradually develops understandings and skills that enable him/her to become an independent learner who strives to make sense of the world. For the child, action is both a way of life and a mode of learning.

The teacher serves as a facilitator of active learning, the link between the child and the environment, and as a role model. In order to foster the child's progression through various stages of growth, the teacher initiates new activities and behaviors, introduces new materials and concepts, and instigates problem solving. The teacher establishes the environment and makes choices available to the child, all the while providing guidance, support, and comfort.

The Pre-K School recognizes that each child is a unique individual, worthy of respect. Each child is encouraged to grow to his/her potential through nurturing and challenging experiences.

The school is concerned not only with the child's growth, but with staff development and parent education as well. Since the school sees itself as an extension of the home, open communication between parent and school is of the utmost importance. The Pre-K School promotes the parent's interest in the classroom and involvement with holiday observances, special classroom events, and projects. Furthermore, parents are encouraged to participate in the adult education programs of the Temple in order to enhance their understanding of both child development and Jewish home practice. It is hoped that school and home can thus complement one another in fulfilling their shared responsibility for the development of the child.

Philosophical Rationale: *Nursery School*

The Nursery School at Stephen S. Wise Temple seeks to provide a warm Jewish environment in which children can develop an intense feeling of pride in their heritage. The religious and cultural program at the Nursery School affords children the opportunity to observe and participate in Jewish customs, rituals, and holiday observances so that they can develop their identities as American Jews who are connected with Jews in Israel and throughout the world. The values of Judaism, and of Reform Judaism in particular, permeate the school program.

The goals of the school focus on the development of the "total child." The educational program strives to support, stimulate, and guide the growth of the child in each of the following developmental areas : emotional, social, physical, creative, cognitive, spiritual, and Jewish.

The school's philosophy and curriculum are based on the notion that children pass through a number of relatively predictable stages in their growth. As the child interacts directly with peers, adults, and the objects and materials in the environment, he/she gradually develops understandings and skills that enable him/her to become an independent learner who strives to make sense of the world. For the child, action is both a way of life and a mode of learning.

The teacher serves as a facilitator of active learning, the link between the child and the environment, and as a role model. In order to foster

the child's progression through various stages of growth, the teacher initiates new activities and behaviors, introduces new materials and concepts, and instigates problem solving. The teacher establishes the environment and makes choices available to the child, all the while providing guidance, support, and comfort.

The Nursery School recognizes that each child is a unique individual worthy of respect. Each child is encouraged to grow to his/her full potential through nurturing and challenging experiences.

The school is concerned not only with the child's growth, but with staff development and parent education as well. Since the school sees itself as an extension of the home, open communication between parent and school is of utmost importance. The Nursery School promotes the parents' interest in the classroom and involvement with holiday observances, special classroom events, and projects. Furthermore, parents are encouraged to participate in the adult education programs of the Temple in order to enhance their understanding of both child development and Jewish home practice. It is hoped that school and home can thus complement one another in fulfilling their shared responsibility for the development of the child.

The Teacher's Role

The teacher at Stephen S. Wise Temple Nursery School/Pre-K supports and fosters child growth and development while creating joyful and exciting Jewish experiences. He/She is a facilitator of active learning and a role model to children, parents, and other staff.

Each teacher is a unique individual possessing special qualities and strengths.

The teacher's involvement with the Temple, Nursery School, and Pre-K programs occurs in many different capacities. One of the major areas of concentration is working with the children during the day, at both planned group times and classroom work periods, and also during transitions and yard play.

The varying teaching roles that one may assume are sensitively selected according to the individual teacher, the child, the larger group of children, the teaching team as a whole, and/or the activity. These roles may include:

Modeling: The teacher can serve as a role model for appropriate behaviors and possible actions. In particular, he/she demonstrates positive feelings about being Jewish. And since young children learn primarily through their senses with language as a secondary reinforcer, modeling can often be more effective than verbal rules.

Nurturing: The teacher can foster the development of self-esteem in the young child by being loving and comforting while preparing learning opportunities that provide for support and reassurance.

Motivating: The teacher can help a child grow to his or her full potential by offering suitable experiences that nurture and challenge as the child develops. The teacher serves as a stimulator of action and a facilitator of learning who encourages and guides children in their growth.

Communicating: The teacher can establish an atmosphere that promotes an ongoing relationship between him/her and the child. By providing, eliciting, and receiving information in both a verbal and nonverbal manner, communication is enhanced. The teacher needs to encourage new and expanded language in the child, along with being aware of and observant of the many nonverbal cues. Open communication cultivates self-discovery and creativity.

Providing Choices: Independent learners

require the ability to select among options. Therefore, the teacher must make a variety of choices available to enable the children to practice appropriate decision making.

Considerations regarding the type and number of alternatives open to a child are dependent upon such variables as the child's developmental level, the individual's temperament, the population of the group involved, and the actual activity.

Participating: Just as the child learns through active involvement with people and materials, so must the teacher be viewed as an active participant in the educational process. However, a balance must be reached whereby the teacher also creates an environment that allows the children freedom to interact with their peers and to manipulate and explore on their own without adult input.

Observing: For teachers to understand their students better, they must be aware of what to look for when watching children. Children's actions and words represent their thoughts, feelings, and perceptions of the world. Therefore, competent observation becomes a crucial component in working in the Nursery School/Pre-K.

Setting Limits: Materials, equipment, and social environments require that rules be defined and limits be maintained. Basic health and safety needs cannot be met without this requisite. The teacher will also have the role of mediator in various conflict situations.

Accepting: The teacher must accept every child as an individual, listening to them and attempting to understand them. He/She must practice being flexible in and adaptable to a variety of situations. Spontaneity in terms of both the teacher...capitalizing on the "teachable moment"...and in terms of the child's natural make-up is an essential ingredient in fostering child growth and development.

In addition to working with the children during the day, the teacher's involvement in the Nursery School and Pre-K programs also includes daily planning and program preparation, staff interaction (sharing of ideas, team work, role model for assistants), parent communication, encouragement of parent participation, and professional growth (through workshops, seminars, conferences, in-service meetings, etc.).

Balancing the manifold responsibilities plus understanding various teaching strategies will ultimately enhance the total development of the child.

Germantown Jewish Centre: *Early Childhood Program*

INFO SHEET

Report By:
Ruth Pinkenson Feldman

Date:
November 24, 1992

Type of Setting:
Synagogue

Name of the Setting:
Germantown Jewish Centre

Address:
Lincoln Drive and Ellet Street
Philadelphia, PA 19119

Denominational Affiliation:
Conservative

Contact Person at Setting:
Eddie Appel

Position:
Early Childhood Educational Director

Approximate Number of Students: 65

From Ages:
6 months to 5 years

Number of Teachers: 14

Approximate Budget (*if available*):
$200,000 plus

What particular emphases of this school are worth noting:
Day care within a synagogue setting
Strong family involvement

Introduction

Let me begin by calling attention to a change in the name of this particular program. The name was originally the Learning and Development Program, the Early Childhood Program, or simply, the Lower School of Germantown Jewish Centre. It was suggested by the parents' committee that the name be changed (at least internally) to "Mishpochah." I mention this at the outset because I think it reflects the essence of this program. The choice of the name, Mishpochah, exemplifies both the parents' and school's self-perception of this endeavor as one that includes the whole family, not just the child, and at the same time recognizes that the goal of the program is to create a "family" out of all of the combined constituents. As we shall see, the choice of the Hebrew word for family (Mishpochah) also reflects the intentional emphasis on the Judaic element of the program as fundamental to its existence.

System and Site

It is difficult to overstate the feelings of attachment and involvement that the parents in this program have toward the school. A dedicated Lower School Committee oversees the $200,000 plus annual budget, working with the school's full-time director and the staff of fourteen full-time and part-time teachers and assistants. While $200,000 may seem high, it should be noted that most of it pays the salary of the director, part-time administrative assistant, teachers, and assistants. Recruitment for this program is mostly a word-of-mouth operation. Although the program has been written about extensively, with articles and pictures appearing in the local Jewish and secular press over the past twelve years, no paid advertisement has ever been taken. Many families stay with the program for up to ten years, as each of their children may spend the first five years of their lives enrolled in the school. That is a significant amount of time in the development of a child and in the formation of a family.

When the program began in 1980, it was unique in the Philadelphia area. It was one of the first programs in the country to provide day care for children as young as six months and to accommodate to the needs of working families by providing both full-and part-time opportunities to participate in a developmentally based Jewish school within a synagogue structure. Even though other programs have now become available throughout the city, Germantown continues to attract families and fill its classrooms as it creates a compelling version of a new extended family.

Parent involvement is strong. Over the years parents have taken on more responsibilities and members of the Lower School Committee have gone on to serve on the Germantown Jewish Centre executive boards and governing boards throughout the synagogue structure. Many families have joined the Centre as a result of their child's participation in the program, increasing the membership by as much as 20% of the Centre's new members in a given year.

Parents are welcomed both into the Centre itself and into the ongoing program. The presence of parents is obvious as they bring their children in the morning and as they linger later in the afternoon when they pick the children up. A staggered schedule supports individual work schedules of the parents and also encourages parents to meet other parents and to observe their own children and their young friends. This is not an insignificant

observation. Many schools intentionally design their programs so as to limit parental access and observation. Some schools have rigid drop-off and pick-up policies and rules about car pool lines that essentially preclude parents from entering the building. Germantown's philosophy of welcoming parents (which does not include having parents spend the entire day) recognizes the parents' need to socialize. One of the dimensions of Jewish identity is that of "number of significant friendships with other Jews." A policy that is designed to increase parents' opportunities to meet each other fosters an environment where these friendships can develop.

The physical plant of the Centre was greatly enhanced at its tenth-anniversary celebration, in 1990, when a new playground was dedicated. In addition to an intriguing playground, climbing apparatus and slides, there is a cement fountain showing the children's hand and footprints and the initials of the many children in whose honor the celebration occurred (a great fund-raising project). It also testifies to the sense of real family and ownership that the parents feel about the program. (As an aside, the T-shirt designed for that anniversary also featured the name of every child who attended the program during its first ten years!) The playground has a sand ground cover and an area for safe trafficking of tricycles and appropriate challenges for toddlers as well as preschoolers.

The inside of the building reveals the shoestring budget on which this school has been developed and maintained. Needless to say, with more funding and more maintenance staff, the floors would shine more and adequate storage and shelving would abound. However, the good news is that each classroom is designed and maintained for the age level of the children in the class. Two of the classrooms have heterogeneous grouping of children between the ages of six months and three years. Two classrooms are for threes and fours, and one is for a pre-kindergarten, where most of the children turn five during the year. A visitor can tell by the physical layout of the classroom that different things are happening in each room.

The rooms are well equipped with age-appropriate furniture and child-level shelving to facilitate access to materials. Each room has comfortable carpeting and seating for adults and children to sit and read, relax and be together. The rooms are filled with children's learning materials, art projects, blocks, and buildings.

The hallways display bulletin boards highlighting Jewish holidays, themes, and pictures of Israel. There are posters and children's art work along with painted murals throughout the school. There is a large parents' bulletin board that calls attention to upcoming family entertainment events, trips, and concerts in the Jewish and general community along with health and product safety information. Articles of interest on child development, education, and Jewish interest are frequently seen. There is also an attractive display announcing "new arrivals" — new siblings in this growing family.

The classrooms for the younger children have individually designed, carpeted, enclosed play spaces to accommodate the youngest children. This allows for safe exploratory behavior while at the same time creating a protective zone from the older children. This does not mean that the youngest ones stay in that area, and sometimes the older children climb in to play, but the room can accommodate and adapt to differences in activity, interest, and management needs. There are low tables, highchairs, and play equipment suitable to the specific level of toddlers. A separate room is available for napping, and individualized sleep schedules are maintained. (The nap room is an area earmarked

for updating when funds become available.) Parents have provided and or donated cribs and playpens for the children over the years.

The classrooms for the combined threes and fours are similar in that each has child-level open shelving for the children to work at and for displaying learning materials. One classroom has a large climbing house structure, the other has more open space (although some of it became an enclosed office for the school director as the school grew).

The classroom for the five year olds (pre-kindergarten) is the smallest room. It has ample table and floor space to accommodate the approximately 12 children in the class. A large area of the room houses the extensive collection of wooden building blocks. Each classroom has a housekeeping area, a building area for the blocks, easels, and art materials; and a quiet area for manipulatives and writing activities. There is a soft area of some sort near the bookshelves in each of the rooms.

The downstairs of the Centre has what is referred to as the Canteen room. During the week the children in the early childhood program use the area for riding toys, large muscle development, i.e., very active play. The room is used mostly during the winter and inclement weather during the morning and in the late afternoons.

Staff and Supervision

Unfortunately, the image of day care in general is one of low staff morale and high turnover. At least at this center, however, this is certainly not the case. In a field where the national turnover rate is reported at close to 50%, the staff at the Germantown Jewish Centre boasts a rate as low as 8%. Some teachers have been with the program since it began in 1980. Although the program loses about one teacher per year, it seems to have an uncanny ability to attract teachers who mesh with the whole system. Some of the teachers who have left the program return to work in the summer or at least stay in contact with the program and the families.

The majority of the staff live within close proximity of the school. The staff is divided between teachers and assistants. There is a clear division between "teacher" and "assistant" in terms of responsibility for planning and teaching. However, there is definitely a shared responsibility in terms of relating to all of the children. The head teachers in the program are all Jewish. The assistants are both Jewish and non-Jewish; most of the non-Jewish are Afro-Americans, representative of the immediate interracial community. (This will be discussed more fully in the section on programming.)

There are a number of factors that contribute to the low turnover rate of this staff. For one thing, several of the assistants come from one large extended family. The stability of the staff to some degree reflects this family, all of whom were recommended to the program as personal friends of a previous staff person. However, more important is the true respect the assistants feel, not only from the parents but from the head teachers and the director. There is a great deal of emotional support, a sense of belonging and contributing to something meaningful in the lives of the children and their families and in the lives of the staff as well. They are treated as professionals and compensated adequately. The high level of staff continuity creates a stable environment in which the same person has frequently been the primary care giver to several children within the same family over the years. When children return to the program to visit, they can see the same people who taught and took care of them. Seeing many of the staff in the neighborhood also contributes to the feeling of familiarity and stability.

Salaries of the staff have always been on the high end of a rather low scale in the field of day care. This scale itself, it should be noted, is even less than that for synagogue-based nursery programs in the Philadelphia suburbs. The current director has fought hard in the Centre to get benefits as well as salary increments for the staff. Needless to say, the teachers in the Hebrew school make much higher salaries per hour than any of the staff in the early childhood programs, but the salaries have increased over time and have always been at the top of the field.

The Centre is licensed by the Department of Public Welfare of the State of Pennsylvania. In accordance with recent regulations for state-licensed day care centers, each staff person must have a minimum of six hours of training per year. However, even prior to this state requirement, this Centre has had a firm commitment to staff training and in-service development. Staff members regularly attend workshops provided by the Central Agency for Jewish Education of Greater Philadelphia, as well as local workshops provided by the general day care community. The director is an active participant in both the Jewish and nonsectarian communities, in the local coalitions, and in support and training opportunities for directors. A major in-service opportunity was made available to the staff when an independent Jewish Early Childhood Specialist was hired to work directly with the children and staff on Jewish content programming. This came about first as an internship for the consultant who was then hired for a two-year period.

The staff, from director to teachers and assistants, are committed to ongoing training and are active participants in the many opportunities offered throughout the city. The school sends representatives to the annual early childhood conference sponsored by the Auerbach Central Agency for Jewish Education and sends teachers to participate in workshops; each participates in at least one session and some may attend three or four sessions. Even as one of the most experienced staffs (who also serve as models for others in the field), they are themselves eager to learn. Two of the teachers in the toddler classrooms have pursued higher education degrees and many have enrolled in workshops and courses.

The directors have all had at least a Master's degree or a B.A. plus graduate education; in addition, with varied experiences, each has brought a unique orientation to the program. A testament to the program's integrity is that over the course of three directors, the program has maintained its excellent reputation and continuity of goals in its commitment to the Judaic content of the program, its orientation as a family center, and its commitment to a relaxed program of play-oriented, individualized, excellent education.

Supervision is handled by the director and is mandated by the state's criteria for certification. Written records are kept in each staff person's file and are updated at least once per year. Continuous discussions of children, program, and staff morale contribute to the ongoing supervision process. As in any team, it is clear when something is not working, and in order for a program like this to run smoothly, everyone must do her share — plus!

Educational Program

The educational philosophy of this program is described as "eclectic." However, the words most frequently used in explaining the program to prospective parents are "play oriented," "developmentally appropriate," somewhat like the "Bank Street approach," and "very experiential." All of this translates into a very relaxed atmosphere where there is autonomy within each classroom, allowing for the individual style and personality of the teacher

to be projected, yet throughout the school there is a clear child-oriented approach which results in all of these classrooms being much more like each other than they are like other schools.

There is a preponderance of children's work displayed throughout the school. Bulletin boards evidence lots of individual art projects, walls display charts telling stories based on the children's own experiences. Recipe charts show ingredients and directions that as a rule are meant for very young children to "read." Going in and out of the classrooms, an observer sees children engaged in dramatic play, working on cooking and building projects, working in small groups or individually or with a teacher. You get the feeling that a great deal is going on simultaneously, but the sounds are "busy" sounds and not noise or chaos.

If you look closely in any of the rooms, including those for the toddlers, it is clear from the room itself that there is some "theme" that is being worked on, looked at, or talked about. Much of the work looks like a project that is being worked on over several days or weeks. In the older classes, murals and graphs chart the children's learning experiences.

The school prides itself on an educational philosophy that takes account of the needs of individual children. When pressed to explain this further, the current director expressed a very revealing and important attitude. She said, "If we see a child is having difficulty sitting through circle time, we ask a lot of questions to find out what's going on. We also ask questions about the program, such as maybe the circle time is too long, or we try to see some other reason for why this activity is not holding this child's attention."

This is very important. Too many programs for young children assume that it is the child who has the problem and never even think to look at the program.

In the effort to adapt to the needs of individual children, there is great flexibility in a school this small in terms of placement of children into classes. Since each classroom has mixed aged grouping, it is possible to have a three year old as the oldest or the youngest child in a group. It is also possible to switch classes when the personalities of children or teachers would be better served with a change, or conversely, when an attachment is strong and sometimes slow to develop, children can stay in a classroom for several years.

This school also tries whenever possible to mainstream children with special learning needs. Although doing this is not always possible, the philosophy is to try to accommodate to the needs of these children, especially when there are very few other opportunities within the Jewish community. The director and staff are understanding and supportive of parents' concerns and try to accommodate to special arrangements to keep these children in the program and to make referrals to other specialists as needed.

Jewish Education

The Jewish educational component of this program has always been integral to its existence. The program was founded on the belief that very young children can learn about the Jewish part of their world and life in the very same ways they learn about the rest of their life. So, for the very youngest children the curriculum is a very concrete, hands-on, and experiential mode of encountering their Jewish world. Through the young child's senses, he or she hears, sees, tastes, and touches an array of Jewish foods and ritual objects. The child is exposed to a language of Jewish song and prayer in Hebrew and English. Jewish concepts are "discussed," an atmosphere is created, and the young child experiences the delights

of Shabbat, holidays, and relationships with other people. The children are known to the rabbi, cantor, and educational leaders in the synagogue and are frequent visitors to the chapel and main sanctuary, particularly when these are not in use. The schoolchildren are regulars in the building of the sukkah, and each year they come with their parents to a family dinner in the sukkah. There is generally a special Hakafah on Simchat Torah for children and families of the Centre's early childhood programs during the congregation's evening service. There is a strong showing of children and their parents at the Megillah reading as well, where there is even one "reading" designed specifically for children and their families.

The strong commitment to teaching the children to experience Shabbat itself and not just learn about it in the classroom is evidenced through the school's participation in Shabbat programs sponsored by and at the Centre, including Shabbat dinners, special designated Shabbat morning services where the children are called to the bimah, and most important, a children's Shabbat morning program (Tot Shabbat) developed by Lyndall Miller, which now boasts three programs for children of different ages. This is also indicative of the strong impact this program has on families. Parents do bring their children on Shabbat. (In all fairness, some of these parents would be coming to services anyway, but many others have begun to come only to accompany their young children.)

There are family education programs prior to many of the holidays. These are funded from the synagogue itself, with the educational director/cantor, as well as a special person hired to do programming for families.

The teacher with each class is knowledgeable Jewishly and provides information and programming activities. The nursery school comes together once a month for a "Shabbat" service on Friday morning, and then each class lights candles and celebrates in its own classroom. The Learning and Development Program (i.e., the infant toddler program) meets together every Friday. Both of these schedules are designed to reflect the school's philosophy that each classroom is a kind of "home" wherein Shabbat and other events are celebrated, and then each "home" unit comes together with the others to form a community.

School-wide events and programs have involved the cooperation and support of the entire staff. An excellent program on Israel was undertaken this past spring in which each class took on a different aspect or geographic area of Israel. The entire physical school as well as the parents and staff contributed to its success. This "Israel experience" was a perfect example of what is meant by the approach of experiential education — it applies to learning about the experiences of life outside of one's own personal experiences, but it uses every mode of the child's ability to appreciate the experiences of others. One of the nursery classes created a "cafe," one class learned about and built the Kotel, and the third classroom became the "Shuk." All the children visited and "experienced" life created in these other classrooms. Many of the children wrote messages or wishes and placed them in the bricks of the "Kotel." The outside play area with its sand ground cover became the site of an archaeological dig as well as a present day desert, equipped with a teacher/child hand-made camel, driven by a Bedouin (parent) driver!

The non-Jewish teachers in the program truly assist when it comes to the Jewish program. They do not teach or introduce religious concepts or prayers. They do support the holidays as well as Shabbat by either helping children with craft projects, facilitating the celebration through room arrangements, or helping with the follow through of any given activity.

The director of the program is herself an observant and knowledgeable Jew. She knows how to hire and supervise a staff in the Judaic components of the program. She is clear with parents as to the orientation and goals of the school and makes policy recommendations and programmatic issues on the basis of a strong commitment to Jewish education.

While it is difficult to claim direct "success" and while we must factor in elements such as financial considerations and geographic access, a high number of graduates of this early childhood program have gone on to enroll in day schools. As of 1990, the Centre had 50 children enrolled in local Jewish day schools. Approximately half of each class has gone on to Jewish day schools, others have chosen other private schools, and some attend local public schools.

It is almost impossible to walk down the halls or to enter a classroom and not know that this is a Jewish school. The ongoing music, the content of the curriculum, the art on the walls, all combine to testify to an integrated curriculum. There is an attempt to balance for religious pluralism among the (Jewish) families themselves as well as to have varied choices of Jewish lifestyles among the staff itself.

It should be noted that this program from its inception drew from a group of Jewish families many of whom were already active in a Havurah style minyan of the Germantown Jewish Centre. However, while it still draws and supports that constituency, it has attracted many other families, and the combined interaction of families brought into the Centre through their children, along with the families who were already there, resulted in a blend of interests, varying lifestyle choices, and many models of "being Jewish" within one synagogue.

Jewish Primary Day School

INFO SHEET

Report By:
Miriam Feinberg

Date:
December 3, 1992

Type of Setting:
Day school

Name of the Setting:
Jewish Primary Day School

Address:
Adas Israel Congregation
2850 Quebec Street, NW
Washington, DC 20008

Denominational Affiliation:
Conservative

Contact Person at Setting:
Susan Koss

Position:
Administrator

Approximate Number of Students: 35

From Ages:
4 ½ to 7 ½

Number of Teachers: 9

Approximate Budget *(if available)*:
$175,000

Introduction

The Jewish Primary Day School (JPDS) is a Hebrew day school, kindergarten through grade 2, which combines a strong commitment to high standards of Judaic, Hebrew, and secular education while understanding and adhering to developmentally appropriate early childhood learning experiences. Additionally, family involvement with the school's overall policies and day-to-day activities is valued highly.

History

The Jewish Primary Day School was founded in 1988, with fourteen kindergarten children, by Congregation Adas Israel, a Conservative synagogue in Washington, D.C. Having been housed at that site since its founding, it has a current enrollment of 35 children in kindergarten through grade 2. The school administration anticipates extending to grade 3 next year, and eventually to grade 6.

Philosophy

The school's philosophy, consistent since its inception, stresses the importance of providing an environment that fosters:

- trust and bonding among teachers, children, and parents by developing open lines of communication.
- a learning atmosphere that demonstrates the importance of each child's individuality and the development of her/his unique strengths.
- recognition and integration of developmentally appropriate practices on each level, in relation to each child's experiences and capabilities.

To this end, the program has always:

- maintained small classes in an attempt to achieve desirable teacher—child ratios. The number of children enrolled in each of the classes has never been permitted to exceed sixteen, in an attempt to provide optimal expression of ideas and language development opportunities for the children in Hebrew, Judaic, and secular studies.
- recognized young children's need to learn through hands-on experiences. All of the staff have been trained in and have developed curriculum following the principles outlined in the *Math Their Way* and *Math in Stride* curricula, thus encouraging the children to discover mathematics concepts, as well as methods of learning transferable to other subjects, through handling, manipulating, and estimating materials.
- integrated secular with Hebrew and Judaic studies wherever possible.
- been sensitive to the wide range of religious and cultural backgrounds in the school population while maintaining a strong Judaic curriculum.
- striven to adhere to spiral curriculum development, while building on a foundation of experiences and knowledge established in previous learning activities.

Structure of Classes

There are presently sixteen children enrolled in the kindergarten, ten in grade 1, and nine in the second grade. Each class is staffed with three teachers; one secular, one Hebrew, and one Judaic.

Curriculum

Hebrew

This curriculum is presented entirely orally in the kindergarten class, the goal being to develop a foundation of Hebrew sound recognition, before progressing to reading and writing in grade 1. The kindergarten children are presented with visual and aural recognition activities of the alphabet and with Hebrew words which they learn orally. In all grades, Hebrew presentation is rich in participatory games and hands-on activities.

Starting in grade 1 the children are grouped for reading activities.

Judaic Studies

The staff is extremely aware of the wide range of beliefs and practices among the school families. A concerted effort is therefore made to teach in a nonjudgmental and accepting manner.

The basis of the curriculum for all grades is Jewish holidays, blessings, Torah, and Jewish values. It is presented in a spiral curriculum format, mostly orally, with an emphasis on teaching more intensively with each successive year. A goal of Torah study is to help the children understand behaviors and feelings of the patriarchs and matriarchs. Because the classes are small, discussions are frequent and provide opportunities for deeper understanding of the material.

During the last half hour of class time on Friday, the children participate in a Kabbalat Shabbat service. At that time, the teacher tells a story, either about the *Parasha* or, if the *Parasha* is difficult, the focus is instead on a famous Jewish historical figure. Before the Jewish holidays the stories frequently focus on Jewish folklore connected with observances of Marranos or Holocaust victims. The first- and second-grade children frequently perform a play for each other, which they have developed on their own, based upon the topic of the *Parashat Hashavuah*. Occasionally the staff also performs for the children.

There is an effort to teach in a very tangible hands-on manner whenever possible. The kindergarten children make hallah every Friday morning, and they take it home to contribute to their family's Shabbat table.

In observance of Yom Hashoah and Yom Hazikaron, the children sit on the floor in the hall outside of their classrooms. They read and listen to poems and stories, sing *Ani Maamin* and *Hatikvah*, and light *yahrzeit* candles.

Just prior to the school model seder, in conjunction with the children's learning about *Ha Lahmah Anyah* ("This is the bread of affliction"), the parents send dairy or pareve sandwich makings, cookies, chips, and toiletries to school. The children and parents then make sandwiches together, wrap them, and place them into bags with the other items. They then place all of the items onto a truck which has been sent from a local shelter for homeless people. Following this activity, the children make *haroset* for their school model seder, and then they prepare for and participate in the seder.

Other opportunities for teaching tzedakah and *gemilut hasadim* (deeds of kindness) to the children include the kindergarten children's making sandwiches at a shelter for homeless women, all classes' placing money in a tzedakah box prior to lighting Shabbat candles, and the gifts of toys for Hanukkah and Pesah food from all of the children to new Americans.

The curriculum combines a great awareness of current events with a Judaic response. During the Gulf War in 1991, the first- and second-grade children recited psalms daily.

Secular Studies

LANGUAGE

The school has adopted the Whole Language

approach in all Language Arts activities, including reading readiness, reading, and writing.

The children on all grade levels write journals, which they may illustrate if they wish. They use inventive spelling until they show readiness to progress to standard spelling (for some children this is mid-grade 2, and for others the end of grade 1). The kindergarten children write journals on unlined paper. In addition, the children on all levels create class books on a variety of subjects such as seasons and holidays, both in English and in Hebrew. If they wish, the children may dictate their thoughts to a teacher, who will write for them. The books, which are later illustrated and laminated, become available for the children to use in the classroom.

The *Writers' Workshop* curriculum is used in grades 1 and 2. Next year, when the school extends to grade 3, this program will be extended as well. The third graders will write poetry and be taught to keep an editing notebook.

The children are taught to read and write in English beginning in grade 1. Starting in grade 1 they are grouped for reading activities.

SOCIAL STUDIES

When learning about a particular topic, the children in all grades research and write about it (or dictate to the teachers if they have not yet developed writing skills), thus frequently creating classroom books. They come to school in costume if appropriate to do so, cook, and explore the community (since the school is located in the heart of Washington, D.C.) for information to share. The children do not use social studies textbooks.

MATHEMATICS

Kindergarten and grade 1 secular studies staff have completed *Math Their Way* and *Math in Stride* courses, and they integrate principles and activities from those programs.

SCIENCE

The children do not use science books. All science lessons are presented in a fully participatory manner.

MUSIC

Music and art are a part of each day. Creativity and spontaneity are valued and encouraged. The children meet with a music specialist once a week for a formal music lesson. Otherwise, music is casually and frequently integrated into the general curriculum by the regular classroom staff.

ART

Twice a month an art specialist involves the children in an intergenerational program with senior adults who participate in the Congregation Adas Israel Nutrition Program. The program focuses on famous artists' works and techniques, and ways to use those techniques in art activities.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

A specialist meets with the children once a week for physical education activities. The school also makes use of its backyard park for hiking and field play.

Parent Involvement

Newsletters

Parents write a four-page monthly newsletter which they distribute to all school families and grandparents. Included in the newsletter are articles by the JPDS administrator, the teachers, the children, and the parents. The children's submissions include jokes, crossword puzzles in Hebrew and English, stories, interviews with their peers, movie and television show reviews, sports critiques, and fashion articles.

Lunch

Parents supervise and participate in lunch with the children.

School-wide Holiday Celebrations

All holidays (Jewish and secular) are celebrated in

a school-wide manner, with parents volunteering to help in the classrooms. Children, staff, and parents work together in planning, preparing, and enjoying these activities. For example:

Thanksgiving, Pesah, and Yom Haatzmaut: They cook and then enjoy a feast (or model seder, or meal) together.

Tu b'Shevat: All of the children participate in a variety of centers, each of which offers an opportunity to experience the holiday in a different way (for example, arts, cooking, science, and math activities). Parent volunteers move with small groups of children from room to room and from center to center while the educational staff engages the children in learning experiences at each of the centers.

Purim: Parents and children plan, prepare, make, and deliver mishloah manot baskets (which they take to shut-ins in the neighborhood). They plan and participate in the Megillah reading, a carnival and a Purim se'udah (festive meal).

Lag BaOmer: Parents and children participate in a school-wide picnic in the park.

In addition, the children develop a museum with objects brought from home. Then they invite the children and parents of the nursery school, which is also housed in Congregation Adas Israel, to visit the exhibit.

Fund-raising

Parents have assumed a large part of the responsibility of fund-raising for the school. Some of those programs are as follows.

Hallot for Shabbat: They sell hallot, which they deliver to the families via their children in school on Friday afternoons. They sell the hallot to the nursery school families as well, and the nursery school provides Shabbat flowers for the JPDS families who wish to purchase them. In this way, families can be assured of having hallah and flowers for Shabbat, and the two schools can benefit from the fund-raising.

Supermarket and kosher butcher shop coupons: Coupons may be purchased from those parents who have volunteered to sell them for the benefit of the school. The stores that accept those coupons have agreed to share some of the profit of the sales with the JPDS.

T-shirt sales: A few parents have agreed to organize the sale of school T-shirts.

Purim Ball: On the Saturday night just prior to Purim, the parents participate in a catered dinner at the synagogue, for which they pay. Ball participants come in costume and someone is honored at that event.

Gan Hayeled Congregation Adas Israel Nursery School

INFO SHEET

Report By:
Miriam Feinberg

Date:
December 3, 1992

Type of Setting:
Synagogue-based nursery school

Name of the Setting:
Gan Hayeled Nursery School

Address:
Adas Israel Congregation
2850 Quebec Street, NW
Washington, DC 20008

Denominational Affiliation:
Conservative

Contact Person at Setting:
Shelly Remer

Position:
Director

Approximate Number of Students: 285

From Ages:
18 months to 5 years

Number of Teachers: 32

Approximate Budget *(if available)*:
$500,000

Introduction

Gan Hayeled, the Congregation Adas Israel nursery school, was founded in 1972 with one small class of three- and four-year-old children. Today, 200 children, aged two through five, are enrolled in sixteen classes. The children are placed in classes which meet two to five half or full days weekly, depending upon their ability and maturity levels. In addition twenty-four children, aged 18-23 months, and their parents meet in a classroom with a facilitator once a week. At that time, the children play with or near each other, and their parents participate in discussions of child development and Jewish holiday issues. The school has thirty staff members.

Philosophy

The philosophy of the school is articulated in its handbook in the following way:

> At Gan Hayeled, we believe that each child is a unique individual. Our program is designed to meet the various needs of all children and to help them grow and develop at their own pace and in their own way. Through a variety of hands-on experiences, our children flourish and grow as they explore the world around them. We offer a warm and nurturing environment for our children. Time is devoted to the development of language, cognitive, fine, and gross motor skills through art, block building, science, cooking, literature, manipulative toys, and music.

Goals

The school's handbook states its goals as follows:

A. To provide an atmosphere for fostering a positive self-image.

B. To provide opportunities for being with other children in a setting conducive to the development of the child.

C. To provide a variety of creative and enriching experiences that contribute to the development of the child.

D. To provide a warm atmosphere of positive Jewish experiences.

E. To provide opportunities for meaningful growth activities that will build important foundations for future learning.

F. To provide opportunities for parent involvement within the school.

School Policies

Gan Hayeled policies are defined and approved by the Adas Israel Congregation Education Committee. As a standing committee of the congregation, the Education Committee is committed to providing Jewish education of the highest quality to the students. It sets policies and standards for, and oversees, the synagogue schools. It works closely with the director of education, who is responsible for implementing its policies. It acts as liaison between the schools and the Board of Managers, and it advocates the cause of Jewish education to the membership of the congregation. The Education Committee meets regularly and is composed of parents, synagogue members, and representatives of auxiliary groups, the administration, and the faculty.

The Program

While there are many facets of the school program, only the most striking and pedagogically instructive will be described below:

Developmentally Appropriate Activities for Two to Five Year Olds

The children are placed in classes which meet two to five half or full days weekly, depending upon their developmental levels cognitively, intellectually, physically, and emotionally.

Parent/Toddler Program

This program is uniquely designed for children aged 18 to 24 months and their parents. The class meets once a week, and each session includes various joint parent and child activities and informal parenting discussions on issues relating to childrearing.

Family Participation

Families are encouraged to participate in school activities as much as possible, with particular focus on Kabbalat Shabbat and Jewish holiday celebrations. In addition, parents are encouraged to participate in their child's classroom and to accompany their child on field trips. A demographic look at Gan Hayeled shows that all the fathers of enrolled children work full-time, one-half of the mothers work full-time, one-quarter of them work part-time, and one-quarter of them are at home with their children full-time.

One of the most impressive aspects of Gan Hayeled is the parental involvement in the school. One sees this best in the work of the Gan Parents Association (GPA), a totally parent-driven and oriented organization which has the following purposes:

1. Provide opportunities for friendship and camaraderie among the school's families.

2. Draw the school's families closer to the synagogue and to Judaism.

3. Fund-raise for the school for the benefit of the children and the staff.

4. Be a liaison between the school's director and/or the school staff and/or the synagogue staff and the parent body as needed.

While the organization is not designed to function as a parent-teacher association, at least one staff member attends each of the meetings, in an effort to provide and gain information. Perhaps the best way to understand the importance of parental involvement in the school is to look in detail at the functions of the GPA below.

As we review the functions and activities of the association, we will see the way that connection with Gan Hayeled has the potential to influence families to enhance the quality and commitment in their own Jewish lives. *Gan Hayeled is an excellent example of the way that early childhood Jewish education can go beyond educating the child.* It can offer a window of opportunity for adults to be involved with the larger Jewish community.

a) NEWSLETTER

Monthly issues are sent to the membership. They contain information on items of interest and upcoming events, Shabbat and holiday candle-lighting times, a Mazal Tov column, tzedakah-related information from the Tzedakah Committee, an explanation of a Jewish holiday or a Jewish ritual, a report on the most recent Gan Parent Association executive meeting, and a column submitted by the nursery school director as well as one submitted by the GPA co-presidents.

b) HEBREW LITERACY

Hebrew reading courses are offered weekly at times when Gan parents' children are at school. While this is a synagogue-sponsored program, the GPA encourages its members to participate in it if at all possible and many do.

c) ADULT BAT MITZVAH

The Congregation offers a two-year course of study in preparation for such milestone celebrations, and GPA members have become regular participants in it. Generally, one-third of the Adult Bat Mitzvah class is made up of GPA members.

Participants in this class must be sufficiently proficient in Hebrew reading to be able to participate in Shabbat synagogue services. Those who are not capable of doing so are required to complete a Hebrew literacy course. The adult bat mitzvah class meets every other Monday evening until the last three months before the bat mitzvah celebration, at which time it begins to meet every Monday evening.

d) SHABBAT AND HOLIDAY SERVICES AT THE SYNAGOGUE
As GPA members become more comfortable with each other and with the synagogue, they attend services more and more regularly, forming a strong network of friends who worship and celebrate together with their children.

e) SUMMER (AND WINTER) SOCIALS
All new parents are invited to participate in a social event hosted by veteran parents in their homes. The director of the school and one of the GPA presidents attend each of the socials. Generally, three socials are planned per summer. These socials provide a forum for giving new parents information on Gan Hayeled, the synagogue, and GPA programs. Orientation packets are distributed at those gatherings.

An identical program is offered in December to parents of two year olds who will be starting at Gan Hayeled in January.

f) TEA AND TEARS ROOM
During the first two weeks of school, parents may spend the first 15 minutes of the school day in the classroom with their children. They are then asked to leave the classroom, and if they are concerned about their child, to go to the Tea and Tears Room, which is staffed by GPA members and stocked with coffee and cake. After 15 minutes in the Tea and Tears Room an "old" parent checks on a "new" child and reports back to the parent. If necessary, the teacher may come to the Tea and Tears room and report to the "new" parent.

g) SHABBAT FAMILY SERVICES
The GPA, in conjunction with the synagogue, sponsors once a month, a Friday evening Shabbat family service, between 7:00 and 9:00 P.M. Rabbi Avis Miller, the congregation's assistant rabbi, and Robyn Helzner, the school's musical director, conduct the service with a particular focus on interesting two to five year olds.

As part of the program, one family is asked to light the Shabbat candles, another leads the group in saying the Kiddush, another says the *Motzi* and two others coordinate the refreshments for the evening.

During the service, which is conducted in the Gan Hayeled space, a portable ark is used and the rabbi tells a story. Then there is singing and dancing.

h) SHABBAT FAMILY DINNER
In November, the GPA sponsors a Shabbat family dinner. The coordinator may use any approved synagogue caterer, and GPA subsidies are available if deemed necessary.

On the evening of the program, there is a short service prior to the dinner. The synagogue rabbis, cantors, executive director, and president are invited as GPA guests. Each participating family receives a gift with a Judaic theme. Modest fees for the dinner are requested. There were 280 participants in last year's dinner.

i) PRESCHOOL HIGH HOLIDAY SERVICES
The GPA, in conjunction with the synagogue, sponsors High Holiday services; one for one hour on the second morning of Rosh Hashanah and the other at Neilah. Rabbi Avis Miller conducts the service, with an emphasis on singing High Holiday songs that are appropriate for two to five year

olds. Entire and extended families generally attend these services, which are quite crowded.

j) TZEDAKAH AND GEMILUT HASADIM COMMITTEE
This committee was initiated as a GPA-sponsored activity three years ago. The committee has undertaken to run the following programs annually:

Sandwich Brigade— Once a month each school family is asked to make twenty sandwiches or to package twenty individual desserts at home on Sunday evening and to bring those items to school on Monday morning. A GPA coordinator distributes the food items to Washington, D.C., homeless shelters.

Shoebox Goodies— Just prior to Hanukkah, the children bring shoeboxes to school and decorate them. Each family is then asked to donate one article of warm clothing and/or toiletries to contribute to the boxes. Last year 90 shoeboxes were filled and the extra items were placed in baskets. All of the items were distributed by a GPA coordinator to Washington, D.C., homeless shelters.

Mishloah Manot Baskets— In celebration of Purim, the children bring food items to school which they use to prepare *mishloah manot baskets*. A GPA coordinator purchases baskets. The school families are then asked to contribute gifts of jellies, jams, tea, coffee, crackers, dried fruits, candies (all of which must be kosher), and fresh fruits. The children fill the baskets and distribute them to all of the nursery school staff, the rabbis, the cantor, the administrative staff, participants in the synagogue Senior Adult Nutrition Program, clients of a shelter for the homeless in Bethesda, Maryland, and a home for emotionally disturbed adults. A GPA volunteer coordinates this program.

Pesah Gifts— Under the coordination of a GPA volunteer and the nursery school staff, the children of the school have participated in a Pesah gift-giving project annually for the past few years. Three years ago, the children made Haggadot to give as gifts to New Americans from the Soviet Union. The GPA paid for the postage when those items were mailed to recipients. Two years ago, the GPA donated Haggadot to New Americans from the Soviet Union and the children made Pesah decorations and pictures to accompany the gifts, which were mailed by the GPA. On another occasion, just prior to Pesah, the GPA collected new and good-quality used clothing from their membership and sent it to Israel as Pesah gifts for Ethiopian immigrants.

k) WINTER CARNIVAL
In January or February at a time when the weather is restrictive and young families are eager to participate in a family event with friends, the GPA sponsors a Sunday afternoon carnival held at the synagogue. A GPA volunteer coordinates the carnival with the assistance of room parents. Each class is responsible for organizing and running a booth. There are usually fifteen booths at the carnival. A concert, magician or some other entertainment is provided just prior to the start of the carnival. A minimal admission fee is charged and food and prizes are provided.

l) HAVDALAH DINNER
In March of each year the GPA sponsors a *Havdalah* program the purpose of which is educational. Rabbi Avis Miller and singer Robyn Helzner conduct the program. The synagogue rabbis, cantors, executive director, and nursery school staff are invited as GPA guests. Each participating family receives a gift of a spice box which the children have made in school and a *Havdalah* candle. There is a minimal charge for the meal, which is subsidized by the GPA. There were 150 participants in last year's program, which was coordinated by a GPA volunteer.

m) MAY FAMILY SERVICE

Each May the GPA sponsors a Friday night family service at the synagogue, at which time the Gan Hayeled staff is honored. There is an extremely large attendance at that event, with entire and extended families participating. The school's director presents each staff member with a gift at the program.

n) TEACHER APPRECIATION LUNCHEON

The GPA sponsors and organizes an annual luncheon each June to express appreciation to the nursery school staff for their work throughout the year. There is an attempt to vary the nature of the program from year to year. Last year's program included a catered luncheon, a concert presented by a GPA member who is a professional singer, and a fashion show featuring parents and staff members as models. Tables were decorated with centerpieces made by the school's children. Staff members presented a performance of poems and songs to the parents and received gifts from the GPA. All synagogue employees were invited to participate in the luncheon as guests of the GPA.

o) ROOM PARENTS

There is at least one room parent in each class, and many classes are served by several room parents from the GPA. Those parents perform the following duties for their children's classes:

- Creating and using a telephone chain.
- Organizing the class Hanukkah party.
- Organizing the purchase of a gift from the parents to the class for Hanukkah (collecting money, buying the gift).
- Organizing the end-of-year class party, held at the home of one of the class families or in a public park or playground.
- Organizing the purchase and presentation of a personal end-of-the-year gift for the class staff.
- Organizing the class parent social at the home of one of the parents (an opportunity for parents to get to know each other better).
- Organizing the class parents to take responsibility for running one booth at the Winter Carnival.
- Organizing the class parents to participate in running the Book Fair.
- Encouraging other parents in their child's class to participate in GPA activities.

p) VARIOUS SUBSIDIES AND DONATIONS

The GPA has regularly provided funding for a variety of causes and activities including the following:

- For several years the GPA has provided $500, two-thirds of the expenses for one teacher to attend the annual conference of the NAEYC (National Association for the Education of Young Children). When the NAEYC conference is held in Washington, D.C. (once every four years), the GPA pays the conference fee for all of the teachers.
- The Mitzvah Fund sends donations, personal gifts, and flowers to staff members to note special or unhappy events.
- The GPA is committed to giving an annual gift to each class. The nature of the gift depends upon the amount of money raised throughout the year.
- The GPA pays for baby-sitters throughout the day of the parent/teacher conferences.
- The GPA gives a gift to the school of an item requested by the director.

q) CULTURAL ARTS PROGRAM

The GPA provides funding to ensure that all of the children participate in a variety of cultural arts programs dance performances, concerts, etc. held two or three times annually at Gan Hayeled.

r) SYNAGOGUE COMMITTEES

The GPA views its members as potential future leaders in the synagogue. It is committed to participating actively in synagogue activities by providing participants from their group to the Board of Trustees. In addition, the two co-presidents of the GPA attend the monthly meetings of the Synagogue Education Committee, the Membership Committee, and the Social Action Committee.

s) FUND-RAISING

One of the primary functions of the GPA is as a fund-raising arm of the school. A variety of activities aid in these fund-raising efforts: selling hallot and flowers for Shabbat, selling gifts for Hanukkah or other occasions, running a book fair, and producing a cookbook, entertainment book, school T-shirt, etc.

t) SOUNDING BOARD

Finally, much of the GPA membership has come to view the organization as more than a fund-raising arm of the school or a vehicle for religious education and celebration. They have expressed an appreciation for the fact that it provides an opportunity to share concerns with peers when there is reluctance to speak with the school or synagogue staff. Additionally, the GPA provides opportunities for the Gan Hayeled director and the GPA co-presidents to discuss sensitive issues.

Adi Rapport, Teacher of Four Year Olds

One of the strengths of Gan Hayeled is its faculty. Let us look at one outstanding teacher in the school. Adi Rapport is a most unusual teacher, in her creativity and her ability to foster creativity, among her students; in her eagerness to test new ideas and teaching methods in her classroom; in her awareness of societal concerns and her ability to weave those concerns into her classroom curriculum, which is presented in an age-appropriate manner; and in her ability to articulate the goals and objectives of her curriculum for her students, her classroom assistant, her colleagues at Gan Hayeled, and her students' parents. She would therefore provide an important frame of reference from which early childhood staff could learn. Adi articulates her goals for the children in her class as follows:

1) To develop a positive self-image with a strong sense of who they are as Jews, as children, and as people who care about others.

2) To want to come to school, to be with peers, and to learn.

3) To develop communication skills which contribute to their success in life.

4) To develop a strong sense of independence and life skills which enable them to succeed both as children and as adults.

5) To broaden their knowledge through exposure to a variety of activities and experiences.

Adi has successfully integrated into her classroom a number of interesting educational activities. After successfully completing a three-credit, fifteen-session course in High Scope methodology, she has adapted this program to her own classroom, thus enhancing the quality of the children's learning experiences.

Adi is masterful in communicating with others. She models for the children effective techniques in her listening, speaking, and questioning behavior with them, with her teacher assistant, and with their parents. She creates an environment in which others can learn communication skills.

Adi is outstanding in teaching four year olds about Shabbat, Jewish holidays, Jewish values, etc., but she frequently selects unusual and hands-on techniques for transmitting her ideas. Some of those methods are described below:

Thanksgiving

While most nursery school classrooms focus a great deal of time and energy just prior to

Thanksgiving in learning about Pilgrims and "Indian" customs, houses, dress, etc., Adi's curriculum instead focuses on

- thankfulness— thanking God for what we have. (An analogy is drawn between Thanksgiving and Hanukkah, Purim, and Pesah.)
- immigration— why and from where different people have come to this country
- Native Americans—a representative from the Native American Heritage Foundation visits the classroom and discusses diversity among Native Americans.

Hanukkah/Martin Luther King Observances

Adi developed a program of sharing together with a local public school kindergarten class the Hanukkah and Martin Luther King observances. The children from the public school and their teacher, all of whom are black and Christian, visit the children in Adi's class just prior to Hanukkah. While there, they participate in a number of activities together. They discuss similarities and differences among them and they learn about Hanukkah through food preparation and eating and through holiday stories, songs and dances. Approximately one month later the children in Adi's class pay a return visit to their new friends, who perform a play on the life of Martin Luther King for them. Once again they discuss similarities and differences among them, and they reflect on their understanding of Martin Luther King's life and goals.

Concern for the Homeless

Adi volunteers at a women's shelter every Wednesday and discusses her visit with the children in her class on Thursday morning. In response, occasionally some of the children have presented her with small amounts of money to give to the residents at the shelter on her next visit. The director of the shelter always writes a personal note of appreciation to the contributor. In celebration of Purim the children made and filled mishloah manot baskets to share with the residents of the shelter. Adi periodically brings photos of the shelter residents for the children to see, and vice versa.

Welcoming Strangers

In celebration of Purim, the children create and fill *mishloah manot baskets*, which they take to the homes of New Americans from the former Soviet Union who have moved into the neighborhood of the school.

Concern for the Environment

Each year the class spends several weeks learning about the importance to the environment on earth of all of its growing things. Last year they learned about sea kelp. They went to the public library, where they found information and pictures on sea kelp and the animals that live in it. Then they went to a health food store, where they purchased sea kelp to keep in their classroom. When they came back to the classroom, they started transforming it into an ocean with a sea kelp forest. The ceiling, windows, and walls were covered with blue crepe paper. The floor was covered with green crepe paper. They cut out fish and sea otters from paper and attached them to the walls and the floor. Following these activities they discussed ways in which they might be able to make a difference in preserving the environment. They decided to create a compost heap. After each snack they planted their biodegradable waste. Then they took it all outside, found a place for it, and planted irises in it.

During one year in the past, the children studied rain forests. During another year, they studied endangered species. They always visit a recycling plant in the area, and they start a compost heap which they later use for planting.

Helping Children Deal with Death

In 1989 Adi studied this topic under the direction

of Dr. Sara Smilansky. Since that time she has included it in her curriculum through her own intervention and in response to a concern expressed by a child. She introduces the topic by reading storybooks on death to the children. Then the children discuss death, while she focuses on the concepts that children must learn in order to begin to deal with it. As issues such as pets, relatives, friends, neighbors, or someone in the news arise, the class discusses the issue once again. Last year, on two separate occasions, classroom gerbils died. Following each event, Adi discussed death with the children, the class went together to a park near the school and buried them, marking the gravesite. Then those children who wished to say something in remembrance of the gerbils were invited to do so. As the topic of death arose periodically in the classroom, Adi encouraged the children to discuss it with each other and with her.

Beth El Nursery School

INFO SHEET

Report By:
Charlotte S. Muchnick

Date:
December 7, 1992

Type of Setting:
Synagogue

Name of the Setting:
Beth El Nursery School

Address:
8215 Old Georgetown Road
Bethesda, MD 20814

Denominational Affiliation:
Conservative

Contact Person at Setting:
Ellen Darr

Position:
Director

Approximate Number of Students: 115

From Ages:
2 to 5

Approximate Budget *(if available)*:
$205,000

What particular emphases of this school are worth noting:
Parent-run cooperative

Introduction

There is much to be gained by studying the wonderful world of Beth El Nursery School. Beth El is located in the near northwestern suburbs of Washington, D.C., in Bethesda, Maryland. The school is unique to the area in that it is a parent-run cooperative for Jewish early childhood education. As an integral part of Beth El Congregation, a Conservative synagogue, the school has developed a philosophy that has shaped and fostered its program since 1956. This philosophy provides for the introduction of Judaic culture, religion, and traditions within the framework of the Conservative movement. It fosters the development of positive feelings about being Jewish through involvement in the program by children, parents, and staff.

The school seeks to provide child-centered classrooms in which children and their families are important. Learning through play predominates throughout the school, and positive self-image and confidence are nurtured. The special educational opportunities of parent participation enable children, teachers, and parents to play, work, and grow together.

The philosophy of the school further provides for the encouragement of respect and the recognition of the individuality of each person (child, parent, and teacher). Any child regardless of race, religion, color, or national origin is eligible for enrollment in the school.

Ellen Darr has been the director of the school for almost nine years. Through her considerable talents and skills in Jewish early childhood education and administration, Mrs. Darr has been able to develop a mutually growth-enhancing symbiotic relationship with the Congregation and with the parents of the co-op who are her employers. Her strong commitment to Jewish education is a consistent and constant foundation for the developmentally appropriate program she has fostered at Beth El.

During Mrs. Darr's tenure the school population has tripled in size. The standard morning program has been expanded through additional offerings of afternoon enrichment classes, lunch hour, and a summer camp.

Mrs. Darr has seen other changes as well. As more women have returned to the workplace, there has been some fluctuation of parents' ability to participate fully in the co-op aspect of the school, where parents are expected to assist in the classroom once a week for eight out of twelve weeks. At times, over the years, as many as 23% of parents could not co-op actively. At present, about 3% choose to not co-op. In such cases, classroom aiding responsibilities are taken up by paid assistants, whose salaries are covered by increased tuitions paid by non-co-oping parents.

The cooperative structure of the school is appealing for parents who want a more active role in their children's early education. And, of course, these families benefit from lower tuitions in a co-op school.

System and Size

Beth El's philosophy is clearly stated in several documents, some of which are sent to parents who have requested information about the school. A parents manual, given to all parents at the fall orientation meeting, describes the philosophy as well, and it is further stated in the by-laws of the nursery school.

These documents also describe the structure of the school, explaining parent options for participation. These include full co-op, limited co-op, and non-co-op options. Other parent responsibilities are described, such as serving on the parent board or on committees, unpacking, housekeeping, maintenance, fund-raising, etc.

Parent orientation materials are given out to parents at spring and early fall meetings. The June packet contains standard information forms, a request for co-op scheduling, medical information, etc. The September packet includes co-op schedules, rosters, and other important information necessary for the smooth running of the school.

At the June meeting a discussion of the philosophy, goals, and routines helps to orient parents to the school. Parents have an opportunity to raise questions and discuss the pros and cons of co-op choices. The parents manual and by-laws are discussed at this time. (The by-laws are reprinted in the Appendix to this report.)

The September orientation meeting is used once again to go over important routines and to discuss further the role parents play in the classroom. Parents learn about equipment and supplies, hints for working with children, etc. About an hour or so is spent in the general meeting before parents go into their child's classroom for individual classroom meetings with the teachers.

In terms of recruitment of good staff, Mrs. Darr uses a variety of methods. She has found that ads placed in local papers and the Washington *Jewish Week* are fairly effective. The placement services of the Board of Jewish Education are also helpful. Sometimes word of mouth works best. Mrs. Darr has found that employing parents as aides sometimes leads to problems. Parents tend to enjoy the social aspects a little too much and often have difficulty making the transition to professionalism.

Parents at Beth El Nursery are very involved in the governance of the school. The by-laws clearly state the responsibilities of each member family. The relationship to the congregation is also defined. The parent manual includes descriptions of board positions. It also contains a copy of the enrollment contract to be signed by parents, and this document further states the responsibilities and obligations of the parent.

Mrs. Darr is responsible for planning the educational programming for parents as well as children. She plans for two parent-education meetings each year. She also works with a parent committee to plan a memorial lecture, which was established by the parents in memory of a much loved assistant in the school. Such programs focus on developing parenting skills and often include but are not limited to Jewish topics. One recent topic was "Helping Young Children Understand the Concept of God."

Mrs. Darr uses consultants from the Jewish Social Service Agency and the Board of Jewish Education, and she also calls on talents within her own school or congregation community.

Communication with parents is an important tool in the school program. Mrs. Darr sends home a school newsletter once a month. This method helps publicize upcoming school, congregational, and community events. Teachers contribute short summaries of classroom happenings. Mrs. Darr includes reprints of articles that foster parenting skills and self-confidence.

A copy of the school's curriculum is kept on file in the director's office. The school is state certified and complies with every aspect of the state of Maryland's requirements for licensed nursery schools. Parents can consult the curriculum at any convenient time.

Parents at Beth El feel very much a part of the school and its program. In addition to the June and September parent orientation meetings, fall teas are held for individual classes. Room mothers organize the events, and teachers are invited to attend this strictly social gathering. During the Sukkot holiday, a family Sukkot luncheon is held. Music and singing enhance this very enjoyable event for the whole family. At the end of the school year a picnic is held in June, and both outgoing, staying, and incoming families are invited to celebrate together.

With regard to intermarried families, the school is supported by the congregational group Keruv, which reaches out to such families as well as those in which a parent is a convert. Study sessions and social events help to reinforce positive Jewish feelings and experiences. These events are always publicized in the school's newsletter.

The school also engages in visits and exchanges with neighboring church school groups two or three times a year. These groups are invited to visit at such special times as Hanukkah and for a Shabbat assembly.

Interactions with other community groups are encouraged. The Boy Scout troop that meets at Beth El helps put up and take down the school's sukkah. They also help to spread mulch on the playground. Nursery school parents are in charge of a booth especially planned for young children at the Purim carnival sponsored by the Men's Club. Nursery school parents help out in the Senior Lunch Program two or three times a year. Note cards with designs created by little ones are sold in the Sisterhood gift shop, and Sisterhood members help raise money for the school through sales of scrip.

Nursery school children learn firsthand about support for those in need in the community through tzedakah projects. Mrs. Darr employs experiences that involve real objects instead of collecting money, which is an abstract concept. Instead, children bring in items of Judaica for welcome baskets for newly arrived immigrants, jars of peanut butter and jelly for those in need. Thus tzedakah is taught through real experiences and objects.

At Shavuot, a long-time custom at Beth El enables children to place fruits and flowers on the bimah. These gifts from the children are later taken to hospice homes, shelters, or home-bound AIDs patients.

Rabbi Jonathan Maltzman takes an active role in the program of the school and participates in many school events. Past shared experiences include helping the children see the Torah at Shavuot, leading the service for the family Shabbat dinner, affixing a mezuzah to a new classroom, and leading a Havdalah program. Rabbi Maltzman understands and appreciates the value of the nursery school as an important part of congregational life, and he gives the school a very high priority. The congregation's cantor also participates in the school's program, giving a Shavuot music workshop for teachers.

In a variety of ways, the school fosters the development of a sense of family or community within its own body. There is an active Sunshine Committee, which sends shivah platters to bereaved members. In the case of serious illness within a member's family, other parents organize to prepare and deliver meals and to visit the ill in the hospital. Friendships begun in shared school experiences endure long after the children attend college.

Parents who are active in the school often become the backbone of leadership in the congregation. Expertise gained as parents working at the governance of the school has been further applied

to many other leadership roles in the congregation and the greater Jewish community.

The facility of the school is very well appointed, although the classrooms are not overly large. There is an immediate sense of being in a Jewish school, reflected in bulletin board themes, Judaic play equipment, books, etc. Bimonthly staff meetings are focused on upcoming holidays. Teachers are responsible for handing in lesson plans for the following month. Mrs. Darr reviews the plans and can offer support, especially in the Judaic area if needed.

The Educational Program

Experiences differ appropriately for two, three, and four year olds. Younger children have more time for free play and less structured activities. There are fewer expectations of the younger children. The program grows more complex as children grow. The guidelines of the National Association for the Education of Young Children for developmentally appropriate practices are followed at Beth El Nursery.

Activities and experiences provide for an atmosphere that nurtures, yet encourages growth and discovery through exploration. The children are joyous in their learning at Beth El.

The program fosters learning in an emotionally safe environment. Curriculum goals in this area are well enunciated, as they are also in the parents manual and teachers manuals. Discipline is viewed as a system of skills which develop gradually as the child learns to master his or her impulses and grows in self-esteem and confidence. Such hand-outs as "Winning Ways to Talk to Children" help to develop skills in staff as well as parents.

Staff concerns about particular children or situations are discussed at staff meetings. A team approach to problems may require the expertise of consultants. The Board of Jewish Education provides consultation services to help identify the cause of a problem a child might be having. Further testing may be recommended. Regular parent conferences are held in December and early May.

There is a good deal of integration of Judaic and secular content. Appropriateness relative to the age and stage of children can readily be seen in all experiences. For example, in science the children can observe and record changes taking place in the making of potato latkes for Hanukkah. In math candles can be measured or counted as they are placed in the Hanukkiah.

As was stated previously, the teaching of values, such as tzedakah or gemilut hasadim, is very much a part of the program and clearly described in the curriculum. Many rich and varied experiences are described in both secular and Judaic areas. One additional example of teaching values is the use of Bible stories to apply to present-day situations, such as the story of Abraham and the strangers to help teach the concept of hospitality.

An evaluation process conducted by the Parent Board incorporates evaluations of the director, teachers, assistants, and program. Many people are canvassed for their thoughts and ideas—parents, teachers, rabbi, congregational president, and director.

Staff and Supervision: Parents of the school chair and serve on a hiring committee. The director serves as one of five members who interview and hire new teachers. First Mrs. Darr describes the job's requirements to other committee members. Then parents write ads, place them, and screen incoming calls. The parent group then schedules interview meetings. All applicants are required to teach a class while being observed. The school follows Maryland's guidelines for educational requirements for early childhood teachers. These include a college

degree, and a specified number of early childhood credits and/or experience in early childhood teaching. There is no specific requirement in terms of Jewish education. The preference is for someone who has a Conservative background and who will be a good Jewish role model.

Over time, the staff averages a three-to five-year stay. Much in-service teaching and retraining is therefore required of the director. Mrs. Darr feels a basic frustration with this aspect of her job but acknowledges that the short-term staff situation results from more teachers' needing to work full-time or more hours than Beth El's program is able to offer.

With training, some teacher assistants have developed professionally and have gone on to become classroom teachers.

All of Beth El's teachers are Jewish; a high percentage of the assistants are non-Jewish (five out of six). When teachers are ill, Jewish substitutes are used. This situation places even more of a burden on the director, whose commitment is to maintain a Judaic program.

Beth El Nursery encourages professional development by requiring teachers, by contract, to take two professional days during the year, to visit other programs or take appropriate and useful workshops. The school pays for workshop tuitions. Further, teachers are given a stipend of $100 to use for educational purposes, such as membership in NAEYC. Workshops must be approved by the director.

In-service workshops are planned by the director to stimulate professional growth. Recent topics have included using gross motor skills both indoors and out, working with the difficult child, and developing good parent conferencing skills. Unfortunately, there is no salary incentive for professional growth.

The director is responsible for supervision and for the planning of bimonthly staff meetings. She also meets with classroom assistants once a month. Staff reminder sheets are given out on a regular basis to facilitate the smooth running of the school. Supervision of teachers is done on an informal basis, because of time constraints, but Mrs. Darr tries to get into each classroom every day. She also writes evaluations of the staff. To show that Beth El's teachers are valued, there is a system for providing a bonus for longevity. Staff members are given an amount of money ($100 for teachers, $50 for assistants) for every year they stay at the school, up to $500 bonus per year.

Teachers are also recognized at a Shabbat morning service, along with religious school teachers of Beth El. All parents are invited to attend. At Hanukkah, parents collect money and donate it to a worthy cause in honor of the teaching staff. At the end of the year, parents collect money for a gift for the teachers and assistants.

According to Mrs. Darr, the teachers of Beth El Nursery are paid at a rate above the salary scale of the BJE. Their salaries range from about $9,000 for a new teacher to $10,500, for 3¼ hours for 176 school days. Pay for afternoon sessions is based on a rate of $52 per 2½ hours, and $19.50 for the lunch session. Assistants are paid $29 for the whole afternoon session and $14.50 for the lunch session.

The school offers its teachers personal leave based on the number of days they work. The school does not offer health benefits because positions are part-time.

Mrs. Darr is perceived by everyone with whom she has contact within the school, congregation, and community as a strong, positive role model for children and adults. Her love of children and knowledgeable approach to their care

and Jewish early childhood education demonstrate her many strengths to all who know her.

Specific Educational Programs in Place

Beth El Nursery School's program could be described as a cooperative/family oriented program with abundant learning opportunities for the whole family. For example, the family Shabbat dinner was the culminating experience for a month-long unit on Shabbat. Parents who worked in the classroom learned along with their children about the traditions and observances of Shabbat. Parents shopped for foods, which children then helped to prepare. Parents set the tables; children made floral arrangements and kipot. The rabbi and cantor led the berakhot at the dinner, which followed a short Kabbalat Shabbat service. The director and teachers led candle blessings. Each family was able to take home a song sheet with all of the school Shabbat songs. Following dinner, a festive session of Israeli dancing ended a memorable evening. For 325 people, Shabbat had come to be real, special, and welcome!

Another special event, previously noted, is the Sukkah luncheon, held in the school's own sukkah, purchased by the Nitzanim, the young families group of the congregation. This first gathering of families sets a warm tone for the whole year, and children learn to look forward to each holiday celebration.

Beth El Nursery School is a wonderful place for children and adults. Enriched as it is by the leadership of Ellen Darr, it continues to make a significant contribution to Jewish early childhood education.

Appendix

Materials from Beth El Nursery School

NURSERY SCHOOL BY-LAWS

ARTICLE I—Name

The name of this organization shall be Beth El Nursery School ("the School").

ARTICLE II—Philosophy of the School

The School shall be organized as a parent-run cooperative. Every effort shall be made to retain certification and accreditation by the Maryland State Department of Education and Montgomery County, Maryland.

A primary goal of the School will be to provide a child-centered classroom in which children and their families are important. We will work together to help each child develop the essential skills to become independent, communicate effectively, solve problems, and listen and follow direction.

As part of Congregation Beth El, we will seek to provide a warm joyous atmosphere in which to introduce Judaic culture, religion, and tradition and to develop a positive feeling towards being Jewish. The observance of the Sabbath, holiday celebrations, and aspects of Jewish home life will be included in the classroom program and in special activities outside the classroom.

We believe that school should be fun and that the individuality of each person (child, teacher, and parent) should be respected. We believe in taking each child from where he or she is on the developmental continuum mentally, physically, and socially and helping him or her as far along as possible.

ARTICLE III—Relationship to Congregation Beth El

The Beth El Nursery School, functioning as a parent-participation nursery school, shall be a

separately administered unit of Congregation Beth El, subject to direction from the Rabbi and the Congregation Board as to overall policy. The School will have its own Parent Board and Professional Director who shall:

a) set School policy and curriculum;

b) hire and fire School personnel; and

c) manage the daily operations of the School.

The School will prepare its annual income and expense budget for review and approval by the Congregation Board as part of the Congregation's regular budget cycle.

ARTICLE IV—Organizational Structure

Section 1. Members shall be the parents or guardians of the children enrolled in the School.

Section 2. The Executive Board shall be comprised of the chairperson(s); vice-chairperson; treasurer(s); secretary; and Director.

Section 3. The Executive Board shall be comprised of the chairperson(s); vice-chairperson; treasurer(s); secretary; room representatives (one per class of 10 or less children; two per class of more than 10); Congregation Beth El Board representative activities representative(s); scheduling representative; membership representative(s); fund-raising representative; health, safety, and equipment representative(s); the School's delegate to the Maryland Council of Parent Participation Nursery Schools (MCPPNS); the Director; and the teacher(s). The Executive Board can create, change, or drop positions from the Parent Board at its discretion.

Section 4. The Staff shall consist of the Director, the teachers, and the classroom aides.

Section 5. The fiscal year shall begin July 1 of each year and terminate June 30 of each year unless otherwise prescribed by the Parent Board.

ARTICLE V—Admissions and Enrollments

Section 1. Eligibility.

a) Any child, regardless of race, religion, color, or national origin, shall be eligible for enrollment in the School.

b) September enrollment shall be based on two year olds attaining the age of two before they enter school, three year olds attaining the age of three by January 1 of the following year, and four year olds attaining the age of four by January 1 of the following year.

Section 2. Enrollment. The number of children enrolled in each class shall conform to the recommendations and requirements of Montgomery County and the Maryland State Department of Education.

Section 3. Order of Admissions. Applicants have priority as follows:

a) children continuing in the School;

b) siblings of children continuing in the School;

c) children of members of Congregation Beth El;

d) other applicants, in the order that applications have been received.

Section 4. The date by which applications and agreements for the following year shall be accepted will be set annually by the Parent Board.

ARTICLE VI—Tuition and Fees

Section 1. A nonrefundable application fee shall be paid at the time of application for admission. The amount of the fee shall be decided by the Parent Board.

Section 2. The amount of tuition shall be established by the Parent Board.

Section 3. One month's tuition shall be paid when a signed agreement (contract) is returned.

(This advance tuition will be used as the last month's (May) tuition and shall be nonrefundable.) Thereafter, tuition shall be payable by the first of each month. Members will be assessed a late fee in an amount determined by the Parent Board, on tuition payments received after the 10th of the month.

Section 4. If a Member withdraws at the request of the School, a full refund of advance tuition, including the May tuition, shall be made.

Section 5. An activities fee for each student shall be paid by the day the child enters school. The amount of the fee shall be determined by the Parent Board. The fee shall be scaled according to the number of days per week the child attends class. This fee is nonrefundable.

ARTICLE VII—Meetings

Section 1. Roberts Rules of Order, as revised, shall govern the conduct of Parent Board, Executive Board, and general Business Meetings whenever specific provisions of the By-Laws are not applicable.

Section 2. Parent Board meetings shall be held on the first Monday night of every month from August through June, or upon written request of five representatives on the Parent Board, or upon a petition signed by 25 percent of the Members. The Board meeting agenda shall be distributed to all Members one week prior to the meeting. A simple majority of the Parent Board shall constitute a quorum. A voting majority shall constitute a majority of votes at any meeting where a quorum is present.

Section 3. General Business meetings of all Members shall be held in June for the following year, and in September before the start of school.

Section 4. Parent Education meetings shall be arranged by the Director in response to the interests or needs of the Members. There shall be a minimum of two such meetings within each school year.

Section 5. Quorum at Membership Meetings. A majority of the voting Members shall constitute a quorum.

ARTICLE VIII—Duties Of Members

Section 1. Members are entitled to one vote for each child currently attending the School.

Section 2. Each Member shall participate in the classroom on a regular basis as either a full co-oper, a limited co-oper, or a non-co-oper. The frequency and conditions of in-class participation shall be established by the Parent Board.

Section 3. Each Member shall be responsible for transporting his child to and from school. Car pools, although strongly encouraged, shall be voluntary.

Section 4. Each Member shall share in the responsibility for maintaining clean classrooms on a rotating basis. This includes unpacking the classroom equipment in September and packing it in June.

Section 5. Each Member shall participate in one work party each year for the purpose of maintaining the outdoor and indoor equipment.

Section 6. Each Member shall provide snack for his/her child's class on a rotating basis.

ARTICLE IX—The Parent Board

Section 1. Selection of the Parent Board. Any member in good standing shall be eligible to serve on the Parent Board. Members shall register their interest in serving on the Parent Board with the secretary prior to the February Board meeting. At the February meeting, the Parent Board shall select a chairperson; vice-chairperson; treasurer(s); secretary; room representative (one per class of 10 or less children; two per class of more than 10); Congregation Beth El Board representative; activities representative(s); fund-raising representative; health, safety, and equipment representative(s); and the School's delegate to the Maryland Council

of Parent Participation Nursery Schools (MCPPNS) to serve on the Parent Board for the upcoming school year. The Parent Board may fill vacancies in Board positions at any time during the year.

Section 2. The tenure of the Parent Board shall be from June 1 to May 30.

Section 3. The Parent Board, with the advice of the Director, shall be responsible for setting School policy and reviewing the operations of the School.

Section 4. The Parent Board shall be responsible for the employment of Staff Members, and the determination of their salaries.

Section 5. The Director and teacher may request the withdrawal of a child from the School, if necessary. The procedure shall be as follows:

a) To protect the privacy of the family, a teacher recommending withdrawal of a child shall, with concurrence of the chairperson and the Director, first discuss the problem situations with the parents.

b) If the parents choose not to accept the teacher's recommendation, the issue may be brought to the Parent Board for discussion at a duly constituted meeting where a quorum is present. At the meeting, a two-thirds vote of the Parent Board shall be required to support the teacher's request for the withdrawal of the child.

Section 6. The Parent Board shall approve expenditures, other than budgeted or normal operating expenditures, exceeding $50.00.

Section 7. The specific duties of each Board position shall be described in the Manual, Appendix I.

ARTICLE X—Duties of the Executive Board

The Executive Board shall act in emergencies and during those periods when School is not in session or when an immediate decision is necessary. Such Executive Board shall exercise all powers of the Parent Board when the Parent Board is not in session. It shall not however have the power to amend these By-Laws.

ARTICLE XI—Duties of Staff

Section 1. The Staff, consisting of Director, teachers, and classroom aides, shall, with the cooperation of the parents, be responsible for carrying out the operation of the School and maintaining State and County accreditation.

Section 2. As Beth El is a State certified nursery school, it is required that the teachers be certified in early childhood education, or be working towards such certification, the above to be completed within a two-year period.

Section 3. Each staff member shall sign a contract approved by the Parent Board, which contract will be signed by the co-chairpersons or, by a chairperson and treasurer on behalf of the School.

Section 4. Said contract should be offered no later than March 15th of every year and should be returned no later than April 15th.

Section 5. The staff is expected to live up to all conditions of said contracts.

ARTICLE XII—Committies

The Parent Board may form such Committees as needed and may establish their tasks and authority.

ARTICLE XIII—Amending the By-Laws

Written notice of proposed amendments shall be provided one week prior to balloting. By-Law amendments shall require a two-thirds vote of the voting members.

Chizuk Amuno Early Childhood Education Center

INFO SHEET

Report By:
Rena Rotenberg

Date:
December 2, 1992

Type of Setting:
Synagogue

Name of the Setting:
Chizuk Amuno Early Childhood Education Center

Address:
8100 Stevenson Road
Baltimore, MD 21208

Denominational Affiliation:
Conservative

Contact Person at Setting:
Sandee Lever

Position:
Director

Approximate Number of Students: 300

From Ages:
2 to 5

Number of Teachers: 40

What particular emphases of this school are worth noting:
Jewish holidays
Family programs

Introduction

As soon as one opens the door to enter the preschool at Chizuk Amuno, one senses the warmth, the nurturing, and the sense of caring all within a rich Jewish environment. This is all accomplished in the framework of an integrated educational program described later in this report.

The Chizuk Amuno Early Childhood Education Center, the Solomon Schechter Day School, and the Chizuk Amuno Religious School are all housed in a building that was constructed several years ago. The preschool is housed in a separate wing, with its own entrance. The preschool director and the religious school director share an outer office, each professional having his/her own office.

The four-and five-year-old children come into school by way of the entrance to Schechter. In this large lobby, there is usually a display of Judaica. In fact, during and right after Sukkot there was a large and interesting array of sukkot made by the Schechter children. All the other preschool children enter through the nursery school door, where there is a bulletin board on the theme of *gemilut hasadim* (deeds of kindness). At various holiday times, other bulletin boards deal with that holiday. Every room has a mezuzah on its door, there is a Shabbat bulletin board in every classroom, and there are pictures and books on various aspects of Judaica in the library areas of all the rooms. On Friday hallot are sold to parents who have ordered them.

All the lobbies have attractive bulletin boards and wall displays. The children walking through these areas are exposed to various aspects of Judaism as they walk to the gym, the synagogue, or other parts of the building. In the lobby and walkway to the synagogue,there is an extensive collection of Judaica, and these objects are pointed out to the children as well.

Data show that 70% of the children go on to the Solomon Schechter Day School, 10% go on to the Mechina and the Religious School. Some of the other children go on to other day/religious schools in the community.

In addition, the nursery school is a filter to the families; that is, it is largely fulfilling its goal of reaching out to families. The nursery school participates in outreach programs of The Associated Jewish Community Federation of Baltimore.

Goals and Community

The Chizuk Amuno Early Childhood Education Center has a parent handbook in which the philosophy and the goals are clearly articulated. At the first interview, prospective parents are informed by the director that the school wishes to reach out to the parent community, to raise the Jewish consciousness of the parent. These goals are continuously articulated throughout the year in every manner of communication between the school and the home, parent newsletters written by both teacher and director, flyers announcing programs, etc.

This school enjoys a good reputation in the community. Although it is administratively separate from the Solomon Schechter Day School, which is also housed in this building, some parents look upon Chizuk Amuno's preschool as a feeder to the Day School.

Active recruitment is usually not necessary; preregistration is opened first for current students, and after a certain period of time, registration is open to the general community.

Parental Involvement and Communication with the Home

Parents are actively involved in the school's activities:

- They are Shabbat guests on Friday.
- They are invited to share in preparations for and celebrations of holidays (grandparents too).
- Torah for Tots is held every Shabbat.
- Parent/Teacher Association sponsors a Shabbat Express (parents can order hallah and candles).
- *Lamishpaha Program*: Families make a commitment (fee charged) to participate, both at home and at school, in a Jewish family experience. In this program, families meet at the school on a Sunday afternoon and participate in family-oriented activities. Families are encouraged to engage in the Jewish experience at home and receive guidance in doing so.
- There is a Hebrew literacy course for parents.
- *Havdalah* service is held in which all the families are involved; after the service and the program, *Havdalah* candles and a tape of the *Havdalah* service are sold.
- There are ongoing workshops for parents on themes of concern and interest to Jewish parents, such as teaching Jewish values in the home, talking to children about death, etc.

At registration time, the goals of the school are clearly articulated by the director. There is, after that, ongoing communication between the school and the home: Parents receive notices, newsletters, and suggestions for home activities. For example, in 1990/1991, Our Jewish Home, a board game, was sent home and families were instructed how to use the game.

The curriculum is explained clearly to the parents. Most of the parents know and understand the curriculum but do not ask to know the specifics of what went on in school.

The parents are very supportive of each other and of the faculty. A network is established whereby incoming parents are helped by those whose children have been in the school for at least a year. New parents are helped to feel at home within the Chizuk Amuno family. There is a feeling of camaraderie; the door of the director's office is always open and she sees her role as a catalyst to assist in the networking process.

It is recommended that intermarried families who wish to place children in the school contact the rabbi of Chizuk Amuno; they are given one year to implement conversion.

Involvement in the Local Community and the Synagogue

Children participate in the food drive for the Kosher Food Pantry of the Jewish Family Services and in the Mitten Drive at Hanukkah time; lost and found items are donated to a local charity.

One of the congregation's rabbis visits the nursery school on a regular basis, usually every Friday. The parents are invited monthly to meet with the rabbi in the chapel. The rabbis view the nursery school as benefit for the synagogue: financially as a feeder into the Solomon Schechter Day School and the Religious School, and as a vehicle for encouraging membership in the congregation.

The School as Community

The teachers feel that they are part of a family; there is a great deal of sharing among classes and various activities done jointly; and this spirit is conveyed to the children. The staff refers to itself as part of the

Chizuk Amuno family. A teacher of one class will greet and know by name children of another class. The physical setup of the school with its adjoining rooms adds to the feeling of community.

The Educational Program

Observing the Chizuk Amuno Early Childhood Education Center, one immediately sees:

Nurturing, caring, well-trained teachers

Clearly defined interest areas

Age-appropriate materials

Bulletin boards and wall displays are on the children's eye level and children's artwork is displayed throughout the setting. The book/library area is in a quiet part of the room, away from the main activity areas. Housekeeping and block areas are well equipped, and both have props to stimulate dramatic play. There is easy access to an outdoor play area, and bathrooms easily accessible to the children.

There are many opportunities for hands-on play. There is a good selection of manipulative materials along with child-sized furniture (table and chairs). The science table is easily accessible to the children.

The Jewish dimension of the program is clear and obvious to any observer. There is a director to whom Judaism is very important, a way of life, and teachers who feel good about being Jewish.

One sees mezuzot on the doorposts and Judaica objects in the housekeeping area (candlesticks, wine cup, play hallah, etc.). There are puzzles on Jewish themes in each classroom and books on Jewish themes in the library area.

Pictures and posters of Jewish values are displayed, and Hebrew is used in the classrooms. Containers of Jewish foods are available for play, and correct and appropriate prayers are said before snacks and before eating lunch.

The school exhibits developmentally appropriate educational practice in an "emotionally safe" environment. One sees all the elements of

Language-rich experiences

Integration of content and play

Integration of Jewish and general content

Use of the arts

Specific themes

The children and the teachers are involved in ongoing projects that exhibit Jewish values. In use is a gemilut hasadim curriculum guide which was produced by the BJE as part of the Synagogue Council Program. In addition, there are ongoing projects, such as collecting food for the Kosher Food Pantry of the Jewish Family Services. The children are asked to bring in toiletries, mittens, and winter hats to be donated to homeless children. It is also evident from visiting the school that the teachers think of themselves as role models to the children and their families.

Staff and Supervision

There are no non-Jewish teachers in this school. All the teachers have a background in education, although not all in early childhood education. Where it is lacking, efforts are made to have teachers receive early childhood training. The state of Maryland requires that all teachers of young children have at least two courses in early childhood education, one in child growth and development and a second in curriculum.

There appears to be a very close relationship between the staff and the students, as well as the staff and the families of the students. There is very much of a "family" feeling here.

The turnover of staff is very small, a majority of the teachers having been at Chizuk Amuno for at least five years. As new staff is hired, veteran teachers welcome them and assist in learning about the regular routines and procedures at the school.

There is a stipulation in each teacher contract that the teacher must participate in continuing education. This school is part of two programs that were designed to offer incentives to teachers to continue in their professional development. Both of these programs are funded through THE ASSOCIATED: Jewish Community Federation of Baltimore:

1. *The Synagogue Council Program for the Enrichment of Jewish Education* encourages teachers to attend in-service sessions, offered by the Early Childhood Education Department of the Board of Jewish Education, on various topics regarding Jewish early childhood education (five sessions during the course of the year). Teachers receive remuneration for attending four or more workshop sessions. This program has also seen the development, through the Board of Jewish Education, of curriculum guides for the early childhood educator: *Shabbat Through the Grades Early Childhood Level; Gemilut Hasadim Early Childhood Level; Prayer Curriculum Guide Early Childhood Level; Israel Curriculum Guide Early Childhood Level.* It must be noted here that the director of this school, Sandee Lever, was a co-author of the *Shabbat Through the Grades Early Childhood Level* volume together with the director of the Early Childhood Department of the BJE.

Rachel Meisels, who serves the school in several capacities—director of programming for Judaic studies, teacher of three year olds, and also teacher of first grade in the religious school—was a co-author of the other publications noted above, also with the director of ECE Department of the BJE.

2. *The Joint Commission Program on the Quality of Instruction in Jewish Schools* offers incentives to encourage teachers to take courses in Judaica and Jewish early childhood education at the Baltimore Hebrew University: tuition cost is covered; teachers receive a course bonus; and they get a salary supplement as they reach different levels on the salary scale.

Many of the teachers at this school have been students at the BHU for many years, several reaching advanced levels on the certification process. This year Sandee Lever, director of the school, is teaching a course on Jewish Family Education for Early Childhood.

In-service education is offered within the school itself, in addition to that offered by the BJE, on those days when school is not in session. (The school follows the public school calendar and thus there are some professional days for teachers.)

Various professionals from within the congregation and other experts in various fields are workshop leaders. Teachers are also encouraged to attend outreach seminars, sponsored by a joint committee from the public schools and the independent schools in Baltimore County. These outreach seminars (four a year) deal with general issues of concern to all early childhood educators. The Maryland Committee for Children, a local advocacy group, also runs programs of interest, and many of the teachers at this school participate.

One year an Ulpan for preschool teachers was offered at Chizuk Amuno at the request of the director. This course was offered through the Baltimore Hebrew University and was required for all the teachers.

This year the Board of Jewish Education, Early Childhood Education Department, through a grant, is offering a Program to Train Judaic Resource/Demonstration Teachers for Preschools. Each school has one representative in this program, which began in September 1992. The teacher from Chizuk Amuno has already offered a

demonstration lesson at her school. During and after her training period she will serve as an additional resource to the teachers at her school, by giving workshops, presenting additional demonstration lessons, and answering whatever inquiries staff members might have.

Supervision is provided by the director of the school and the BJE's director of the Early Childhood Education Department. The school's director visits every class and every teacher twice a year, at the start of the school year and again at the end of the year. An oral report is given to the teacher. In addition to these in-depth supervisory visits the director visits each class almost daily. The BJE's visit is usually once a year. Each teacher is given advance notice, and the visit is preceded and followed by a conversation in which aspects of the class/lesson/environment are discussed. A discussion with the director ends the visit, after which a written report is sent to the director, shared with the teacher, and placed in the teacher's file. If additional assistance is needed, meetings are scheduled with the BJE ECE director. Consultation services to the teachers are provided, on as needed basis or by a scheduled appointment.

This school has a very low turnover rate. Most of the teachers have been there for five years or more. Any assistant who is a qualified teacher is given her own class when the opportunity arises. The director is very supportive of her staff, as is the superintendent of the Chizuk Amuno schools, Dr. Paul Schneider, who, recognizing the importance of the early childhood years, was able to raise the salaries of the teachers.

Various social functions are held during the year to honor the teachers, and the director invites them for a luncheon.

The benefits offered to the teachers are as follows: tuition reduction of 25%, synagogue membership at a 50% rate, congregational pension plan after the third year, health plan in which the congregation pays one-third of the cost.

The teachers feel a very close affinity to Chizuk Amuno and always refer to the school positively and with much pride.

The director, who is herself a role model for her staff, periodically evaluates the program, often meeting with the director of Jewish Studies of the Early Childhood Education Center.

The director considers Jewish early childhood education a priority, and this message is conveyed to the faculty, at staff meetings, by conversations with individual teachers, and by her own commitment to Judaism and Jewish life, ethics, and values. As she encourages her staff to continue their education, so has she continued hers at the Baltimore Hebrew University. She considers the role of the Jewish preschool to be an entry point for young families into the organized Jewish community, and therefore she has designed and developed a variety of programs that involve families of young children.

The rabbi at Chizuk Amuno considers Sandee to be his colleague, knowing that the preschool provides an opportunity for many families to begin to affiliate with the congregation and to enroll their children in one of its schools.

Specific Educational Programs in Place

General Studies Areas:

The Chizuk Amuno Early Childhood Education Center uses the whole language approach in its program. Big Books are used in its classes. Before a field trip is held, books are read and discussion takes place between teacher and children. During the trip, much discussion is carried on with the children. Upon return to the classroom, the children are encouraged to talk about the trip, often

with the skillful use of questions and comments by the teacher. Experience charts are used where appropriate.

Jewish Content Areas:

Bible: Stories from the Bible are told regularly in many of the classes. Every Friday the children and teachers prepare for the coming of Shabbat. The classes go into the chapel, where each teacher in turn tells either a Bible story or a story dealing with a particular Jewish ethic or value. Bible stories are also integrated into Torah for Tots, the weekly Shabbat service for young children that is held at Chizuk Amuno congregation.

Hebrew: An effort is made to integrate Hebrew into the classroom by using it in a very natural way. The school has on its staff a Hebrew specialist who spends a short time in each class, with the teacher present so that she can become familiar with both the content and the methodology and can provide follow-up in the classroom. As a result of the Ulpan class for preschool teachers, the use of Hebrew has increased.

Tzedakah: Every class is involved in helping the less fortunate. One class collects money, then takes a field trip to a food store to purchase food to take to the Kosher Food Pantry of the Jewish Family Services. The two year olds are asked to bring in mittens, the four year olds winter hats. This is done around Hanukkah time, when these things are most needed. All these things are done in the framework of a Hanukkah gift exchange.

When a class is preparing for and celebrating a holiday, all the activities will revolve around that theme. For Hanukkah, the children may decide to build a temple. As the children do this, they will use the measuring, classification, sorting and other relevant skills. Items relating to the holiday are placed in the housekeeping area in order to stimulate dramatic play and to help in the integration and assimilation of themes and values.

Cooking activities, which incorporate measuring, smelling, tasting, and learning about the dietary laws, are also providing integrated experiences.

The Chizuk Amuno Early Childhood Education Center also integrates the Jewish and general educational content through its outreach to the families, in the sense of integrating the home with the school. It should be noted that every Jewish holiday experience in school has a comparable reach-out to the home. The director of Judaic Studies, Rachel Meisels, plans a variety of programs and activities that can take place within the home, to aid in the carryover from home to school and to enrich the home Jewishly.

92nd Street Y Nursery School

INFO SHEET

Report By:
Roanna Shorofsky

Date:
December 22, 1992

Type of Setting:
YM/YWHA

Name of the Setting:
92nd Street Y Nursery School

Address:
1395 Lexington Avenue
New York, NY 10128

Denominational Affiliation:
No denominational affiliation

Contact Person at Setting:
Nancy Shulman, *Director*
Susan Bayer, *Associate Director*

Approximate Number of Students: 170

From Ages:
2½ to 6

Number of Teachers:
29 full time; 3 part time;
2 support staff

Approximate Budget *(if available)*:
$1,156,400

What particular emphases of this school are worth noting:
Shabbat observance
Jewish holidays
Outreach/family education

Introduction

The 92nd Street Y Nursery School has as its mission the commitment to instill a love of Jewish culture to children at the earliest possible time. The Nursery School serves a population of 175 families, most of which are Jewish. For some of the families the "H" in YM/WHA represents their only commitment to being Jewish. Approximately 7% are intermarried families. However, the fact that they choose to attend such a nursery school indicates that they are exploring their Jewish identity, and the school makes it comfortable for them to make that decision. The children range in age from two years and four months through age six.

The Nursery School is housed on the entire sixth floor of the 92nd Street YM/YWHA. When one enters the lobby, there are often holiday decorations (sukkah, menorot) and posters informing people of upcoming lectures on topics of Jewish interest. In addition, the building is closed on Shabbat and on Jewish holidays.

The Nursery School is comprised of nine fully equipped, spacious classrooms, two kitchens, office spaces, and two play terraces for children's outdoor play. Each classroom has bulletin boards outside the doorways, and children's artwork, often created around a holiday theme, is displayed for all visitors and other class groups to admire. In the classrooms, Jewish holiday artwork is also displayed and the symbols of Shabbat enhance the Jewish environment.

Relationship with the 92nd Street Y

The 92nd Street Y, as a Jewish institution, is a wonderful resource, offering many Jewish programs and providing staff resources and support. In addition, the children's librarian, Sylvia Awner, has a strong sense of Jewish mission and sees to it that the library is well supplied with books and tapes on holidays, traditions, folklore, and Jewish history. A book list is generated for both parents and teachers. Each class has a special library time, with Sylvia further solidifying the Jewish input.

Part I: *Jewish Education*

Shabbat and Holidays

Each Friday the school celebrates Shabbat with candles, hallah, grape juice, Motzi, songs, and stories. Often parents are invited to school on Friday to participate in the classroom celebration, and in many rooms a child will be singled out as the special Shabbat child. In addition, each of the classes has a family Shabbat dinner which includes siblings and grandparents. They use their own Shabbat Dinner Handbook compiled by a parent committee. Each family is also given a handbook to take home to use for its own Shabbat celebrations. This dinner is much anticipated and very well attended.

All major holidays are celebrated in many ways: making art projects, singing songs, listening to stories, preparing plays, and cooking traditional holiday fare. Children share their experiences with other classes, and each age is enriched by learning from the other. The school draws on its parent resources to enhance the experiences. Often a rabbi, cantor, or parent whose child attends the school further enriches the Jewish curriculum by explaining each particular holiday service and adding his or her input to our ongoing traditions.

The Nursery School sends out a "Jewish Holiday Hot Line" or newsletter which brings basic information and school traditions directly

into the home. It is not unusual for a child from a nonobservant home to ask a parent to please start lighting candles and celebrating Shabbat at home. The director reports that in one case a three-and-a-half-year-old child suggested to his mother that it was "nice to have a special tablecloth on Friday nights." The following week the child said, "It might be nice to have a special hallah bread." The next week he suggested candles and a blessing too! These parents have found that they too now love celebrating Shabbat. In addition, several of the families have been sharing a Passover seder at the request of four children in one classroom.

Other holiday traditions include the whole school's decorating the sukkah in the main lobby of the Y. All decorations are made by the children and are age-appropriate. The finished sukkah is a marvelous sight and the children are proud of their accomplishments.

On Hanukkah each class performs its rendition of the fight of the Maccabees. Menorot are made from a wide variety of materials and are brought home and used year after year. Parents are invited to share latkes and songs with the classes for their Hanukkah parties.

Passover is celebrated with each class having a model seder using age-appropriate Haggadot and everything needed for the seder made by the children.

Tzedakah

Each year the school sponsors two tzedakah drives one at Hanukkah and one at Passover. The entire school, parents, teachers, and children bring in toys, clothing, and food which are distributed through Jewish organizations such as Dorot[1] for Jewish families in need.

1. A New York outreach organization that serves the Jewish elderly.

Adult Education

Last year the Nursery School ran a lecture series to share the Jewish traditions of the Nursery School and suggest how to incorporate these celebrations in the home. The administration and parents found this series to be quite informative, and the discussion was far broader than anticipated. The panel included a rabbi and two of the teachers who also teach in the 92nd Street Y's Jewish outreach program. The format was a presentation of how the Nursery School celebrated holidays and how parents can make the connection between home and school. The forum provided an opportunity for parents to explain their own personal conflicts in a nonjudgmental, supportive atmosphere. Because of the success of the workshop, there are plans to run it again.

Kashruth

Food on their premises is kosher and parents comply with kashruth laws when making or bringing shared food for the children to school.

Application Process

Parents who apply to the school are asked to visit the school before receiving an application. At that visit it is clearly explained that the school is "a Jewish school, one which specifically celebrates all Jewish holidays and observes Shabbat."

Parents and the School

There is a real give and take between administration, parents, and teachers in all areas dealing with issues of children, including Jewish philosophy. Parents are welcome at all times, in addition to specific days designated for classroom visiting, and they are invited to do a special project with the children if they choose. Parents are also included in the school-wide Hanukkah parties and Passover seders. Many parents have said that the holiday parties are very special because even though they

feel traditional in nature they actually provide the children with individual opportunities to express their feelings within the traditional framework.

The attempt to cultivate a family experience is enhanced in many ways. Teachers and administrators are available to parents every day. Teachers frequently give out home phone numbers so that they are available to parents when needed.

Outreach

Most of the children "graduate" from the Y to attend kindergartens and first grades in a wide variety of public and private schools in New York City. Most families choose a secular school, although increasingly families are choosing schools that offer a formal Jewish education. Although there are no actual data, it is the impression of the administrators that most of the families do affiliate with a synagogue and their children continue in Hebrew schools.

For those families who are not affiliated, the Y's Connect After School program keeps the door open for further Jewish education. Several of the teachers also teach in the Connect program. This is a Jewish educational program that reaches out to families who are not affiliated with a synagogue but would like to continue their child's Jewish learning. Although this is not a nursery school program specifically, many school families register. Since it is held in nursery school classrooms and taught by familiar teachers, it is logical that families whose children are leaving the Nursery School to attend secular schools will enroll in this program.

Part II: *The Educational Program*

At the 92nd Street Y Nursery School, there are 172 children, ages two years and four months to five years old, housed in the nine classrooms. The children are divided into ten groups which are fairly even in boy/girl ratio and quite close in age range. Class size (determined by the N.Y.C. Board of Health) differs according to ages. Each group has three teachers; one head teacher, one associate teacher, and one assistant teacher. The age groupings and class sizes are as follows:

Two-day toddlers: ages 2.4–2.6 yrs	10 children
Three-day toddlers: ages 2.7–2.9 yrs	12 children
Sun Room: ages 2.10–3 yrs	15 children
Orange Room: ages 3–3.3 yrs	15 children
Yellow Room: ages 3.4–3.6 yrs	15 children
Rainbow Room: ages 3.7–3.10 yrs	21 children
Silver Room: ages 3.11–4.2 years	21 children
Green Room: ages 4.3–4.6 yrs	21 children
Blue Room: ages 4.7–4.10 yrs	21 children
Red Room: ages 4.11–5.6+ yrs	21 children

With the groups close in age range, the focus is a developmental one. The school focuses on the development of the whole child. The philosophy of the school is characterized as flexible within structure. The program is child oriented with a hands-on approach so that children can interact with a variety of developmentally appropriate materials in formal and informal play.

The day is structured so that the children have a clear idea of how the day proceeds and can anticipate and feel secure in that expectation. The day is balanced with both teacher-structured and child-directed activities, and also a balance of active and quiet times. The time is apportioned so that the children can spend their day in small or large groups, with staff available to interact on a one-to-one basis as well.

There is a great deal of emphasis on creative expression. Through art projects, dramatic play, storytelling, and writing, children develop a sense of who they are and with that a solid sense of self-

esteem. Children learn cooperatively with each other and with the teachers. The curriculum in the three-year-old groups allows children to begin to explore the world around them and to understand their place in the world, their family, and their friends. Concepts such as colors, shapes, and sizes are explored as well. The twos and threes celebrate Shabbat and the Jewish holidays with song, stories, cooking, and appropriate blessings.

The four- and five-year-old groups begin to discover new ideas as well, presented thematically. Concepts are introduced through activities such as artwork, stories, exploratory play, and trips. Hebrew is not taught as part of the program but only as exposure through prayers and songs.

In addition to a stimulating classroom experience, the children also participate in a number of enrichment classes. Weekly, the children have a specialist in music who focuses on singing, rhythms, and imaginative play. They also go to the Y's library each week. For a semester, all the groups go to a movement class once a week and the fours and fives also participate in a gym class. A science specialist is on staff full time and spends time in every classroom, working with teachers to develop and extend concepts being learned in the classroom. The older four and five years olds also work with her on the computer.

There is no written curricular document. The teachers adapt and change their curriculum regularly to reflect the changing interests of the children and their needs as a group. Teachers are encouraged to try new ideas with the understanding that the nurturing, supportive atmosphere in which each child can feel special and capable is truly the goal of the school. The administrative staff believes that values are most often learned when modeled and it is their responsibility to set clear limits for classroom expectations so that children can feel safe and secure at school. Tzedakah is conceived as a state of mind, not just an activity. Tolerance and respect for each individual is at the core of everything they seek to do.

Part III: *Staff and Supervision*

The school's staff is a remarkable one. There are approximately 30 full-time teachers and four administrators. There is very little turnover. The parents are active in a great variety of ways and the atmosphere of the school is both joyous and welcoming. The Nursery school population is indeed a close-knit extended family. The school is committed to fostering a positive Jewish identity. It is a tribute to the openness and interaction of parents and staff that the community is so strong and established. Lifelong relationships are fostered.

The staff consists of 28 full-time teachers, two-part time teachers, and two professional consultants. Each classroom is staffed with three teachers. The head teacher is New York State certified, with a Master's degree, and a minimum of five years' teaching experience. Associate teachers in almost all cases have comparable qualifications. The assistant teachers are not required to be licensed but several have advanced degrees.

Although the teaching staff is highly qualified—"overqualified" in some cases—it is not their qualifications that make for an extraordinary staff. They exemplify a commitment to excellence, a genuine warmth of feeling for children, and a sincere concern for each other as colleagues. Most of the teachers are mature and many have children of their own. All have varied interests and bring to their teaching a broad range of interests and talents. There is very little attrition at the school.

New teachers generally enter at the assistant teacher level, and when openings occur, they are promoted through the ranks. When new teachers

are brought in at the entry level, a mentoring system occurs as they become part of a team of experienced teachers.

Of the 28 teachers, four are not Jewish. Since they work as a team, the new teachers learn through participation in holiday planning and experience.

Teachers clearly understand that the Jewish curriculum is an essential part of the school and of their responsibility. There is a high level of involvement in Jewish learning by the non-Jewish teachers.

Staff meetings are held bimonthly and all teachers are required to attend. Some meetings are devoted to informal discussion of school-related issues and others are in-service workshops with either school staff or outside professionals leading. Some of the more recent topics have been:

How to deal with difficult parents

What to do with the shy or withdrawn child

Use of nonfiction books in the classroom

Effective parent conferences

Detecting language delays in young children

Teachers are also partially reimbursed for course work in the early childhood field. Conferences are paid for by the school as well. Last year about eight staff members went to the Board of Jewish Education Spring conference and two of the staff members were presenters. Next year the school is going to begin sending two teachers a year to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) conference.

Supervision of teachers is the responsibility of the school director. Meetings with each team of teachers are held weekly at a scheduled time which is consistent through the year. All teachers are required to be present. In this forum individual children, difficult issues, and curriculum planning are discussed. The director also regularly spends time in each classroom informally observing teachers and giving feedback when necessary. The director's door is open and teachers have access to an open relationship with the director and associate director.

Staff morale is an important concern to the administration. There is an atmosphere of openness, support, and respect, and that atmosphere filters down from the administration, to the teachers, to the children, reflecting the values they are trying to inculcate. Each year the administration organizes two staff parties—one at Hanukkah and one at the end of the school year. They are festive and full of fun and allow everyone to feel good about a job well done. A list of staff birthdays is kept, so whenever a teacher's birthday occurs, it is acknowledged.

Teachers' salaries are comparable to those of other similar nursery schools in the area. The teachers are members of the union that represents Y employees, and so they receive a benefits package that is quite comprehensive. Approximately half of the school's budget is used for teachers' salaries, and although this represents a significant proportion of expenses it reflects the high regard in which the staff is held. Through fund-raising efforts a Teachers Fund has been created so that salary increases are augmented by a bonus.

The 92nd Street Y Nursery School is a very special place. There is a clear sense of purpose generated by everyone who works there. The staff is committed to pursuing excellence in early childhood education, fostering Jewish values and ideals, and creating an atmosphere in which everyone feels valued—child and adult.

Moriah Child Care Center

INFO SHEET

Report By:
Diana Ganger
(report solicited by Marvell Ginsburg)

Date:
October 5, 1992

Type of Setting:
Synagogue school

Name of the Setting:
Moriah Congregation

Address:
200 Taub Drive
Deerfield, IL 60025

Denominational Affiliation:
Conservative

Contact Person at Setting:
Diana Ganger

Position:
Director Moriah Child Care Center

Approximate Number of Students: 130

From Ages:
2 to 5

What particular emphases of this school are worth noting:
A social work approach to creating a sense of community

The "Family" Approach in Child Care: *One Director's Story*

I have been trying to think about some comments that many parents have made during the past few years about our school and what exactly makes it special. What makes it different and why is it labeled as one of the best preschool/day care combinations available?

The comments we have repeatedly heard are: "The school has a very warm feeling." "Children look happy and involved." "I see you know everyone." "There is a feeling of belonging, community." There is no simple answer; there are a myriad of small actions that when put together give us the gestalt or whole picture.

My first thought focuses on a strong philosophy. The family is our "client," and each family and child is looked at as individual and unique. This attitude usually starts with the first phone call. Parents must visit the school before enrolling. It gives us the first chance to get to know more about the family and its needs while at the same time making sure they understand and accept the philosophy of the school.

We then get to intake time. This is a time to meet the parents. We hope both parents get involved with the choice of schools and they are given the choice of deciding if the child/children should come along on the first visit. At this point we visit the school and the specific classroom. Later we sit and discuss specifics about the program.

Flexibility is a very important aspect of our program. As long as we have the openings available, parents can choose part-time or full-time care and also choose how many and which days they want to have (minimum two days a week), which usually remain constant for the year. We believe in part-time working parents, and it is very important to provide parents with a choice. Doing so obviously requires the school to play a balancing act, with extra effort from teachers, but it reduces family stress and allows parents to spend more time with their children.

One of the first topics discussed and reinforced with parents is open communication and its value. Parents are allowed to call at all times; phones with intercoms are available in every room, so communication is possible whenever needed. Staff ratios—one extra person in every room—makes this possible. Teachers post the days' activities on their door, which parents may read at pick-up time. The teachers write notes on extended day children every day with "special comment" areas. Twice a year conferences with written reports about each child are prepared.

Parents and teachers meet to exchange information about their child. If any issues arise during the year, parents are contacted and meetings with teachers and the director are scheduled. Staffings are held on a weekly basis with a consultant (social worker specialized in play therapy, parenting, and early childhood). Special books and videos are kept in the office for parents to borrow.

Teachers also write monthly newsletters discussing past and future programming as well as sharing vignettes about the classroom. There is a monthly administrative newsletter with issues that affect the whole school, and a parent organization newsletter with information about ongoing events and issues. These all help keep the family attuned and connected.

The parent organization meets once a month to discuss fund raisers, scholarships, and any issues that parents may wish to bring up. Many friendships have developed thanks to this opportunity. Parents help the school in many ways and at the same time become an integral part of it. Parents and grandparents are invited for Shabbat and other holidays. The start of our intergenerational program is an extension of this philosophy.

This is definitely a Jewish school and that means there is a defined atmosphere. Every classroom has a Hebrew-speaking teacher; parents can hear teachers speaking Hebrew down the halls. Parents have a common thread that brings them and the teachers closer.

Teachers in our school are and feel very professional. There are weekly meetings to discuss the classrooms, other school issues, and articles of interest, as well as staffings with the consultant. When there are no specific issues to discuss, time is used to review the literature. Professional magazines are brought in, as well as new books in the field. Teachers are encouraged to read, attend workshops, etc. Most important though, is the atmosphere created by having staff with *dissimilar* backgrounds—that diversity ensures lively discussions about the route to take to reach stated goals. I believe there should be a certain amount of tension, albeit within a comfort zone. Staff is encouraged to challenge, make decisions, be autonomous, and try new ways.

Policies are revised yearly, both for parent and teacher handbooks. Everything is open for constant questioning, challenge and change. We are lucky to have on our staff currently people from seven different countries. Staff meetings allow for expression of these differences of background. Most decisions are reached by consensus (within the philosophical world view and framework of the school).

Teachers are encouraged to follow the specific issues that are special to the group of children they may have: that is, if there are expectant mothers, invite a nurse and discuss pregnancy and babies; if parents are moving, do a unit on moving; if children are interested in dinosaurs, develop a unit, etc. Also cooperation and help is received from other staff as needed (e.g., a great storyteller on staff will then visit other rooms to share talent).

Substitute teachers are available on staff on an ongoing basis, which provides for continuity for the children and parents. At one of the meetings I attended I was asked how many children the program had. The reply was 125 families—attitude is everything.

REPORTS ON INDIVIDUAL PROGRAMS

Infant/Parent Program of Gan Shalom

INFO SHEET

Report By:
Marvell Ginsburg

Date:
December 23, 1992

Program:
Parent/Infant classes
(45 minutes once a week)

Name of the Setting:
Gan Shalom Early Childhood Center

Address:
Temple Shalom
3480 Lake Shore Drive
Chicago, IL 60657

Denominational Affiliation:
Reform

Type of Setting:
Synagogue school

Contact Person at Setting:
Rimma Khodosh

Position:
Director, Gan Shalom

Approximate Number of Students:
In this program,
10 pairs per class

From Ages:
4 months to 8 months
8 months to 12 months
12 months to walkers, etc. to age 3·

Goals

We now have a great deal of information from the explosion of research begun in the early 1970's on the development of children from their time in utero to age three. Because of this, the school felt it would like to develop a program that would have an impact on parents and infants as early as possible in a positive, age-appropriate, educationally sound Jewish setting. The goals of the Infant/Parent program are to:

1. Reinforce parental Jewish identity and/or motivate parents to introduce more Jewish family experiences into the home.

2. Enable the infants and toddlers to assimilate Jewish sights, sounds, tastes, and other sensory and cognitive experiences to become integrated into their developing selves.

Example: At the end of each class session, the group would go into the synagogue. The director would push a button that made the door of the ark open slowly. The infants were totally fascinated with this "peek-a-boo" with the Torah. As they got older, many children refused to leave the building until they said "Shalom, Torah."

3. Provide support, knowledge, and skills around parenting issues.

The Program

The school decided to offer a graduated series of Parent/Child classes, meeting once a week for 45 minutes, beginning with infants 4–8 months, 8–12 months, walkers, and so on to age 3. There is also a transition class for mature 2.9 age toddlers, whose parents attend with them for about six weeks until teachers and parents agree the toddlers are able to be in school without parents. There is a gradual phasing out of parents. The teachers of these classes are very carefully selected for warmth and knowledge of this age level.

The school does very little now in intensive recruitment. Word of mouth by parents and grandparents does it. The school achieved this stage by carefully defining its philosophy and selecting staff who were very comfortable with this philosophy and who had the ability to work with parents as well as children. Staff also had to be clearly positive about their own Jewish identity as well as having specific understanding about the particular age group they were teaching. This, plus a carefully crafted physical environment which conveyed the school's goals, was the best publicity. The word out in the community is that this is a wonderful school which exudes "Yiddishkeit" of the best kind in a sound early childhood setting.

This is a Reform temple in a city area of rising, affluent, young professional families. There are several other Reform congregations, a larger Conservative one (with a day school), and several Orthodox and Traditional congregations in the area as well. Many families from the latter choose Gan Shalom.

As one young mother put it, "I love the wonderful Jewish experiences my child is getting, and they make me feel like a good mother as well!"

Yet one would not label this an obvious, densely Jewish populated area. There are many senior citizens, single-parent families, and mobile families who move to the suburbs when the oldest child is ready for kindergarten. But these families and children have been deeply affected. These children have spent their entire lives in this excellent Jewish school.

The parents have been involved in Jewish experiences weekly for the first 2 ½ to 3 years of their child's life. The weekly sessions are augmented by tailored family Shabbat dinners, holiday parties, expert speakers on child rearing, as well as articles, bibliographies, and parent—teacher conferences.

The impact of the program is seen by the fact that those parents who do move select a Jewish nursery school in their new area. Indeed for some, having access to a Jewish nursery school is one of their criteria for choosing the place to which they move.

Integrating Parents into Early Childhood Education:

The Early Childhood Center

INFO SHEET

Report By:
Marvell Ginsburg

Date:
December 23, 1992

Program:
Integrating Parents into Early Childhood Education: *The Early Childhood Center*

Name of the Setting:
Early Childhood Center (E.C.C.) Board of Jewish Education

Address:
618 South Michigan Ave.
Chicago, IL 60605

Denominational Affiliation:
3 Conservative; 2 Reform

Type of Setting:
Synagogue schools

Contact Person at Setting:
Janice Cohn

Position:
Director, BJE Early Childhood Center

Approximate Number of Students: 597

From Ages:
2 to 5

Introduction

Scene I: A Hebrew school teacher of a level *hay* class called a mother to set up a conference to discuss her son's behavior. The mother said she was too busy to come in. The teacher suggested he would be glad to drop by the house on his way home to chat for a few minutes. The mother agreed. When the teacher arrived, the mother began berating her son. Then she said, "You don't have to believe in the Torah forever, you just have to behave in Hebrew school for these last ten weeks. Can't you just do that?"

Scene II: A mother and her two year old are sitting on the floor in a Jewish nursery school. They are participating in a one-day-per-week Parent/Toddler Program. The teacher has set out six different *hanukiot* on a low display table with a large container of Hanukkah candles. The child begins to put candles in a *hanukiah*. He claps his hands in excitement, smiles, and says, "Now they are Jewish candles." The mother smiles and answers, "Yes, they are." The teacher comes and begins to sing the Hanukkah blessing. Mother joins in.

Both of these actual incidents illustrate the well-known maximum, "Parents are the child's first and most important teachers." Our tradition tells us, "Thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children. . . ." These days the very serious concern which all of us at every level of Jewish education share is *what* the parents are teaching their children. Obviously in Scene I the mother of the Hebrew school child is teaching an attitude that is destructive to us. It would take an extraordinarily dedicated Hebrew teacher to try to overcome such parental teaching, and probably with little hope of success.

Why talk about a Hebrew level *hay* class in a report on the role of the parent in early childhood education? Because in spite of some acceptance in the general community that nursery school is good for children of the economically disadvantaged, or day care is a necessity for working mothers, there is little genuine understanding of exactly how crucial Jewish nursery school is. We now have a tremendous body of research which explicitly tells us how experiences from birth (even conception) through age five determine the basic thrust of the child's total personality. These foundational experiences form the child's basic positive or negative view of him/her self, his/her family, and in our case a basic mind set of acceptance or rejection of "believing in the Torah forever."

Obviously the Hebrew school child in our story had caught his parents' attitude about Torah (being Jewish, Jewish study, etc.) long before the incident described above. One could speculate that the negative parental attitude was a major contributing factor to the child's acting out in Hebrew school. One suspects that such a family may be lost to Jewish life except in minimal ways.

Thus one might say that early childhood Jewish education is effective preventive medicine. It is aimed at creating a healthy cadre of self-accepting, knowledgeable Jewish children; but perhaps even more important, positive parents.

We all know, as the two scenes illustrated, that even if a school does the most magnificent job in the world, that work is minimized by lack of home follow up. The school cannot do the job of the home.

For all the above reasons (and more) it is time that the Jewish community take an in-depth

look at early childhood Jewish education and learn what it is really all about and what it can do. It is time to give high priority to supporting programs of early childhood Jewish education.

The Toddler Programs

Let's go back to Scene II, the two and a half year old who made "just colored candles" into "Jewish candles." This child comes to his Jewish school once a week with his parent for one and a half hours. A trained, experienced early childhood teacher, who has specialized in studying the needs of two year olds, has created a warm, cheerful, informal Jewish environment. The child has the security of a parent participating with his or her exclusively—(no phone calls, no other siblings to claim time, etc.). The child feels secure and very happy in a Jewish school.

Gradually, as the year progresses, the teacher introduces more Jewish content and more Hebrew language. Since the child is just becoming verbal, he or she acquires the Hebrew as easily as the English, especially when sitting on mommy or daddy's lap on the floor in a circle with others, singing Hebrew songs and hearing his or her parent answer "shalom" to the teacher's greeting or good-bye. Equally important, the parent is having fun acquiring the Hebrew and Judaic content through the class experiences and, even more crucial, a positive attitude toward being Jewish.

The toddler class sessions are augmented by Sunday afternoon family parties for Hanukkah, Purim, and Pesah. These take place on a Sunday afternoon to enable fathers, siblings, and grandparents to attend. It is common in our BJE early childhood centers for a child to bring two sets of grandparents, most of whom learn something about Judaism along with their children and grandchildren.

A very moving incident took place in one of our BJE centers at the Pesah seder for the three and four year olds whose parents and grandparents had been invited to participate. A grandmother of one of the three year olds was asked to come up with her daughter and granddaughter to bless the candles. As the three of them stood before the candles, the grandmother broke into tears. She sobbed, "I remember my bubba lighting candles. I never lit candles in my home when my children were growing up. But you can believe that from today on, I am going to light candles and make Shabbos and Yontif so my grandchildren should have a real bubba." By the time she finished, there wasn't a dry eye in the place. It was probably the most beautiful seder we ever had.

The Daily Nursery Program

This incident brings us now to the daily nursery program our two year old enters when turning three. Having attended the parent—toddler program for a whole year, the child now feels totally comfortable in the school, has developed a positive attitude towards doing Jewish things, and has received positive reinforcement for being Jewish from the most important persons in his or her life, the child's parents and grandparents. There is a minimum of separation anxiety. The child is able to let go of the parent fairly quickly and begin the business of more concentrated Jewish living and learning on a daily basis. (Besides a positive Jewish home, a Jewish nursery is one of the very few areas in Jewish life where a child can be immersed in a "total" Jewish living experience (the other areas being Jewish day school, Jewish summer camps, and Israel experiences as a teenager).

The parents are now brought into the nursery program in a variety of ways to continue their participation in Jewish living experiences on a

regular basis. Only on rare occasions does this include evening meetings. We have found that evening meetings draw the smallest attendance. Parents are generally too busy, too tired, and too overprogrammed. Instead we have devised a variety of other ways to get parents involved with their children.

Several weeks prior to each holiday, every family is sent a rather lengthy newsletter, which contains background about the holiday, a description of our goals and methods for teaching it to the children in school, suggestions for family activities at home, recipes, the Hebrew vocabulary and songs we teach, and a list of resources, books and records for adults and children.

In addition, parents are invited to come help out the teachers during the week prior to a holiday. They help bake Hanukkah cookies, hamantaschen, etc. In fact, one mother told a teacher she baked hamantaschen at home for the first time in her life before she came to school to help out "because I didn't want to feel like a fool in front of my children, not really knowing what to do."

The children bake hallah every Friday in school. They take these home. By the middle of the year we have mothers begging for the recipe. We then send home our "No Fail Hallah" recipe, which we just happen to have in our file. By the end of the school year there are many, many families in the habit of baking hallah every week.

Every family is asked to sign up for dates to be their child's Shabbat guest during a regular Friday class session. Usually a mother comes, but very frequently fathers and grandparents make arrangements to be there as well. The parents attend the entire class session. This visit gives them an opportunity to observe the child in the classroom setting, get an intimate look at the program, and participate in the Kabbalat Shabbat ceremony (some of them for the first time in their lives). Of course their child becomes *"imma"* or *"abba"* for the ceremony.

In fact, as the year goes on, more and more mothers begin coming earlier on Friday to pick up their children, so the teachers move up the time of the Kabbalat Shabbat ceremony. It is not unusual to find a half a dozen mothers and assorted babies as guests, basking in the beauty and warmth of Shabbat and the glow on their children's faces.

Involving Fathers

While we are responsive to needs of mothers and provide for family experiences as well, we include a strong focus on father. A very popular activity continues to be Sunday afternoon father—child play day for each class of three year olds. Fathers and children come from 2:00 to 4:30. Father, as the child's guest, follows his child's lead and they play together for about 45 minutes. They participate in a ten-to fifteen-minute group time which includes singing Hebrew songs, at least one Hebrew game/dance, and whatever else the teacher wants to stress, be it math, science skills, etc. (depending on the particular group of fathers).

Father and child also make something together to take home. The most popular is a "mizrah." They stain a 5" x 7" piece of wood with brown paint or liquid shoe polish. The father and child then select a picture from the *shanah tovah* cards collected by the teachers for such projects. It is glued onto the center of the plaque and they "mod podge" it. Interesting effects are also achieved by distressing the wood, hammering nail head ends all over. A ring top from a pop can nailed on the back makes an excellent hanger. It's a beautiful plaque to hang on the wall at home. Imagine the feeling father and child have every time they look at it.

During the second hour, the fathers move to another room for a discussion. Themes usually include their most positive and negative memories with their own fathers, their reactions to the play experience with their child, their concerns in raising Jewish children, the importance of their role in their children's development with implications for future Jewish identification.

We reassemble for the last half hour to eat a snack which the children have prepared, say a *berakha*, sing zmirot, and form a shalom circle before we leave. We ask each person in the circle to tell what they liked best about the day.

Everyone hates to leave!

Other Ways We Have Involved Parents

1. Mother—child play day is scheduled during a class session which includes a one-hour rap session for moms (plan is the same as father—child day.)

2. Hallah and/or hamantash bake-in day is held with moms and/or dads.

3. Have a Purim costume "make-in" by parent and child in class, prior to a class party. Using a pillow case as foundation, cut out holes at top and sides for head and arms. Decorate with magic markers, cloth, whatever your imagination allows!

4. Parents and grandparents are invited to the class Purim party and school seder. It's amazing how many fathers and grandparents arrange to be there on a school day.

5. Ritual objects are made at home by the child and parents to be used in school for Shabbat, Pesah, etc. One school got the most gorgeous matzah covers that way, used first at a school seder and then for a home seder. Of course, suggestions were sent home explaining the object, its purpose, and how it could be made.

6. "Ripple out Shabbat." A knowledgeable family invites two other families for Kabbalat Shabbat in their homes. They use a specifically prepared Seder Kabbalat Shabbat booklet. These families in turn invite two others to their homes, etc.

7. Supper is prepared by children, and a Havdalah service is held in school on a Saturday evening in December or January. The family makes a spice box to be used during the ceremony. Children present to parents a kit of Havdalah candle and saucer they have made in school. It is used during the service and then taken home.

8. Children and parents plan, shop for, and cook Shabbat dinner at school. The entire family comes Friday evening for dinner and a brief service in the synagogue. They use a Shabbat kit of ritual objects the children made in school. This event is often the climax of a school year.

9. With the teacher, the parents and children plan a family Shabbat weekend retreat at a camp. Such a weekend should be highly experiential in nature. *Examples:*

- Families arrive at camp, settle in rooms, and have lunch. Berakhot, songs, and a mini-version of *Birkat Hamazon* are sung at every meal.
- After lunch, it's planning time to create a Shabbat environment in the physical space and to meet social, intellectual, and spiritual needs of all those present. Adults and children subdivide into small groups to do the following tasks:
- Create murals, stained glass windows, or other decorations for the dining room, chapel, individual rooms, hallways, etc.
- Gather wild flowers and greens and decorate tables, walls, etc.
- Plan services.

- Plan Shabbat afternoon and evening activities. (Some of it has been preplanned so that a mini-library of stories, games, and records is available.)
- Include a great deal of singing, simple dancing, and Shabbat theme for circle games. (Take any favorite childhood game and convert it to Judaism!)
- Adults and children together can plan a simple play portraying the weekend experience or any other pertinent theme.
- Include nature walks to stand in awe, reverence, and delight in our beautiful world. There will be several right moments to recite or sing a lovely version of *Shehechiyanu* (such as the one by Cantor Jeff Klepper of Beth Emet Synagogue in Evanston, Illinois).
- Celebrate "with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might."

10. Sukkot offers excellent opportunities for providing wonderful parent—child experiences. Obviously they can build and/or decorate the sukkah together. In addition to hanging gourds and other fall fruits and vegetables, they might make popcorn for stringing and hanging, make collages from shanah tovah cards, bring vegetables and play classification games, then cook them in a soup to be eaten in the sukkah. Ask parents and children to take nature walks at home to see how the seasons are changing from sum-mer to fall. Ask the parents to write down "stories" the children tell them about what they saw or how they felt going on the walk. Have the children illustrate the stories and bring them to school for teacher to read to the class.

11. Many parents know very little, if anything, about the holiday of Shavuot. As with the other holidays, they need some background material. They can come to school to make cheesecake and blintzes, etc., with the children. They can bring canned goods to bring up to the *bimah* during a special service for the school. The school can arrange a special dairy pot luck supper, and Tikkun Leil Shavuot (traditional all-night study session) either in the synagogue or in the homes. Parents and teachers would make a point the next day to let the children know the parents had studied Torah the previous evening.

12. Class family Hanukkah parties can be held in homes with teachers present, 6:00-8:00 P.M., or Sunday afternoon so father can participate.

13. Hebrew Reaffirmation Naming Ceremony. Explain to the children that since they can't remember being named because they were babies, we will do it again so they will remember their Hebrew names. When we first began this unit, children turned the nursery room into a synagogue and assumed the roles of rabbi, hazan, parents, etc. Their parents (and often grandparents) attended. Each child received a special Hebrew name certificate. The teachers concluded by saying, "In the tradition of our Jewish people, we wish you to group up to study Torah, marry under a Hupah and do good deeds." The parents joined in singing, "Siman Tov and Mazal Tov" and wished teachers "from your mouths to God's ear!" Most parents later said they framed the certificate. It reminds them and the child daily who they are and what is expected of them.

A few years later the ceremony was moved into the sanctuary on Shabbat *minha* as a way of getting parents and grandparents into the synagogue for an authentic experience. We developed a mini-service at which groups of parents and children were called up for each aliyah. The parents chanted the Torah blessings. We tried to select a Torah portion that contained many names. Later, when the rabbi called each child and parents to come up for the certificate, the rabbi explained the

meaning of their names. Many learned the meaning of their child's name for the first time.

14. Parents-Fix-It Day or Evening.

15. "For Fathers Only" evening discussion series was held with a male psychologist.

16. Couples' rap sessions are held with the nursery director and/or a social worker, on the topic of "Raising Your Jewish Preschooler."

17. A bibliography can be prepared for parents on Jewish childrearing. It should include books on child development as well as such books as: Hayim Donin, *To Raise a Jewish Child* (Basic Books, 1977), and Neil Kursan, *Raising Your Child to be a Mensch* (Atheneum, 1987).

18. Parents are invited to videotape school parties, and then the videos are shown to the children and parents. Such tapes can be used for a fun review of the year for children and parents, as well as for public relations for recruitment. The school can also make a little money by selling copies of the tapes to parents and grandparents.

Our parent involvement program is predicated on a number of basic assumptions. Implicitly, one has already been described in great detail. That is, that the most effective way to "re-JEW-venate" Jewish parents is to provide opportunities for them to participate in Jewish experiences with their children in a supportive, warm, nurturing environment. The Jewish early childhood center in this sense becomes the Jewish surrogate family component for the parents, which for some may have been missing in their own lives as youngsters. As was indicated, it serves this purpose for some of today's young American-born grandparents as well. For those who did grow up with Jewish observance, it's a positive reinforcement and a lesson in providing age-appropriate Jewish experiences for children.

Obviously the foregoing can be done at every level of the educational ladder. However, when it begins with children as young as two, it is obviously going to make a greater impact.

We get all of the parents regularly involved in at least 95 percent of the activities provided at the beginning of their parenting role, when they are establishing childrearing patterns. Imagine a young family enrolling their first child at age two. Even if that family does not have any more children, they are participating in the school's Jewish experiences for three years. But the one-child family is rare in our BJE schools in the Chicago area. Thus if a family has two or three children, it can be involved for six to eight years, and having a second or third child does not excuse them from being a Shabbat guest or participating in the holiday parties, *Havdalah* service, family Shabbat dinner, or other activities.

By the time families finally leave our centers (many with tears at the thought of not returning), they have become habituated to enjoying Jewish living and have introduced many practices into their homes.[1] One father stated at a father's discussion group, "Sending our son to this school has changed our entire life." When asked what he meant, he replied, "When my little boy came home from nursery school and asked me, *'Daddy, where is our Kiddush cup?'* I was embarrassed to tell him we didn't have one. That stimulated me to sit down with my wife and discuss what kind of a child we wanted to raise. We decided that if we were sending him to a Jewish nursery school, it made sense only if we wanted him to be Jewish. Therefore, we had to live as a Jewish family. The next day we went out and bought a Kiddush cup and everything

1. Ruth Ravid and Marvell Ginsburg, "The Effect of Jewish Early Childhood Education on Jewish Home Practice," *Jewish Education*, vol. 53, no. 3, Fall 1985.

else. Since then we have a Kabbalat Shabbat every Friday night in our home. And you know, we find that we are really doing it for ourselves now as much as for our child!"

A second and equally important assumption is that relationships among the members of the family need to be healthy and constructive. Jewish experiences and Jewish knowledge alone cannot do the job.

One mother sorrowfully told us at a rap session that her husband felt that Orthodox Judaism had been rammed down his throat by his overbearing, authoritarian father. He refuses to join a synagogue now, or attend services, even on the High Holidays. His sister married a Syrian Catholic. Her children celebrate Christmas and Easter. "However," she added, "When our son comes home from nursery school and chants the Kiddush or says 'Shabbat shalom, *abba*,' I can see my husband begin to melt a little. He even admitted that he sort of enjoyed the family Havdalah service and supper."

In order to help the parents with their feelings and concerns around family living and specific childrearing concerns, we also arrange for informal rap sessions for moms, have a parent discussion group series, and send home articles on specific issues parents suggest such as discipline, bedtime problems, TV, toilet training, etc.

The BJE Department of Early Childhood Jewish Education and the Virginia Frank Child Development Center (CDC) of Jewish Family and Community Services worked out an agreement to try to develop a joint prevention program. The Frank Center is a therapeutic center offering a variety of programs for children under age six with certain types of emotional difficulties. Their parents must agree to be in treatment also.

Parent—child groups were offered at two BJE model early childhood centers for mothers and children below age four with stress in the relationship. They were staffed by one of our teachers and one of their case workers. The goal was to help mothers focus on developmental issues so as to learn to better understand and handle their children's behavior as it related to them. Serious problems were later referred to appropriate agencies for treatment.

BJE/CDC joint planning included a variety of approaches. There was a discussion series at one center for nursery parents which included one or two sessions around Jewish childrearing concerns.

At another center, a CDC case worker was on site once a week in a parent—toddler class as a resource to parents and teacher. She modeled intervention for both and met with the teacher, school director, and BJE consultant to evaluate the process.

Thus by combining Jewish knowledge, nurturing and insight into bettering human relationships, we hope to raise a generation of Jewish parents on whom we can truly rely to teach Torah "diligently unto their children."

Early Childhood Institute

Of the Boston Hebrew College

INFO SHEET

Report By:
Ina S. Regosin

Date:
December 31, 1992

Program:
Professional Development Program for Early Childhood Educators

Name of the Setting:
Hebrew College

Address:
43 Hawes Street
Brookline, MA

Denominational Affiliation:
All Denominations

Type of Setting:
College of Judaica

Contact Person at Setting:
Susie Rodenstein

Position:
Institute Director

This report is dedicated to Dr. Samuel Schaffer (z"l) who was a beacon and a guiding light for Hebrew College during my years as director of the Early Childhood Institute. His influence continues to guide my work.

I wish to acknowledge with deepest respect and gratitude my mentor, Dr. Daniel J. Margolis, executive director of the Bureau of Jewish Education of Greater Boston. His leadership made my years at the BJE more fruitful and intellectually exciting. He is a source of personal and professional inspiration.

Introduction

The Early Childhood Institute (ECI) in Boston, founded in the Fall of 1987, is a cooperative program of Hebrew College, Brookline, Massachusetts and the Bureau of Jewish Education (BJE) of Greater Boston. It is an extremely successful model of a professional training program for Jewish educators. The Institute offers a series of courses designed to help the educator increase Judaic content in Jewish Early Childhood settings. As its founding director, I will tell its story from two vantage points—as I remember its beginnings in 1987, and as I see it today. (I moved from Boston in 1990 but returned for several visits to observe and interview key personnel now connected with the program.)

This report will endeavor to extract the essential factors for the program's success and why/how this program is translatable to other communities. The last section will describe the author's experience in adapting the program in Milwaukee.

Background: *The Field*

The educator working in a Jewish Early Childhood program (day care, nursery, or kindergarten) has the unique opportunity to provide a solid foundation for developmental growth and, at the same time, an environment rich in Jewish experiences. The daily nursery or kindergarten program provides a setting where children can be immersed in total Jewish living. By involving parents closely, these programs can also foster and nurture the Jewish identity of families as well as children.

The quality and quantity of Jewish programming in these settings depends on the knowledge, skill, and commitment of the educator. In Boston, as elsewhere, the majority of Jewish Early Childhood personnel (excluding the Orthodox) lack formal religious education or training in Judaica; these teachers often have state certification in Early Childhood Education. Teachers in Orthodox settings, on the other hand, often lack college level course work.

In 1987 there were approximately 40 Early Childhood programs under Jewish auspices in the Boston area with a combined professional staff of 350. Professional development consisted of on-site, in-service workshops in some of the larger schools and a new BJE-coordinated Early Childhood Conference, also organized in 1987. There was in place a Directors' Council, which met 3 to 4 times a year to discuss common issues and plan the conference.

In 1992 there are 45 Early Childhood programs and a professional staff of 400. The trend toward all-day programming has created more full-time positions. Professionalization of the field is further enhanced by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), boasting a membership of 60,000, an annual conference, a reputable journal and other publications.

Program Goals and Description

The ECI was founded to meet the staff development needs of the growing numbers of Early Childhood programs under Jewish auspices. In Boston, as in other communities across the country, the need for Jewishly qualified Early Childhood personnel is critical. The goals of the program are to upgrade the qualifications, particularly the Judaic component, of the professionals

who are already in the field—veterans as well as beginning teachers and directors.

The program was based around the belief that graduates of the Institute will:

1. increase the Judaic content of their programs in both quantity and quality.

2. develop and integrate Judaic materials and curricula into an overall developmentally appropriate framework.

3. involve parents in Jewish living/learning experiences and as partners in the educational process.

The Institute is a two-year curriculum (two courses offered each year) leading to a Certificate in Early Childhood Jewish Education awarded by the BJE of Greater Boston. The program design is based on research indicating that the most effective professional development activities are ongoing, allowing time and opportunity for teachers to practice what they learn. Interaction among students and the development and sharing of curricula materials applicable to the preschool setting are important adjuncts to the course work.

The program is available to teachers and directors in Early Childhood programs—kindergarten and primary—who have successfully completed an Associate's or Bachelor's degree or their equivalent, with credit given on either the graduate or undergraduate level. Graduate students are expected to demonstrate a more in-depth knowledge in both written and oral work. Courses may be used toward fulfilling requirements from the State Office for Children.

Each course contains a theoretical component as well as a pedagogical practicum or project(s). Sessions are 2½ hours in length, meeting once a week for approximately 14 weeks. This corresponds to Hebrew College offerings for 3 credit courses.

Courses: Year One

FALL: *"Teaching Jewish Values to Young Children"*

This course introduces the general field of Early Childhood Education with emphasis on the special characteristics of the Jewish preschool. It explores basic Jewish values, their source material, and how to apply them with young children.

SPRING: *"Integrating Judaica into the Early Childhood Curriculum"*

This course is designed to help the educator create a developmentally appropriate Early Childhood Jewish curriculum. Skills in planning and implementing quality curriculum are stressed. The holiday cycle is studied as a basis for integrating art, music, science, mathematics, and language arts, as well as Jewish values, customs, and symbols into the program.

Courses: Year Two

FALL: *"Parent, School, and Community in Early Childhood Education"*

This course deals with the vital link between home, school, and the community. Topics include development of family programming, designing newsletters, and leading parenting groups. The potential of the Early Childhood setting as the stimulus for family involvement in the Jewish community is explored.

SPRING: *"Early Childhood Curriculum II —Bible, Hebrew, and Israel"*

This course focuses on age-appropriate content and methods of introducing Bible, Hebrew, and Israel in the curriculum.

In each of the three areas, curricular theory is examined as a means of determining developmentally appropriate material and application in the Early Childhood setting. Topics include selection of Biblical material and development

of activities, language acquisition; basic Hebrew vocabulary and its application through music, games, and stories; and the Israel connection and its philosophical base and resources for programmatic application.

Course Format

Demonstrations, discussions, media presentations, and guest lecturers provide variety. Working in small groups to develop materials or make presentations to the class decreases individual anxiety and adds to group cohesiveness.

Recruitment

The existing Early Childhood Directors' Council served as an important vehicle for recruitment of the first class of students. Ads in the Jewish paper and follow-up on leads by telephone brought in additional students. After the first semester, many students came as a result of friend's recommendations. These remain the essential recruitment vehicles.

An important component of the recruitment process is the "personal interview" with the institute director. This serves as a means of matching the student's needs with the Institute's stated goals. Personal knowledge of each student's background helps the faculty focus on individual needs. The student, on the other hand, receives a personal description of the course content and format. This helps relieve tension, particularly on the part of those students who have been away from formal course work for many years, Israelis who have never studied in English, and others in need of personal encouragement.

Student Body

Students come from diverse settings, representing synagogue schools of all the denominations, JCCs, and unaffiliated schools such as Israeli ganim. There are teachers and directors of nursery schools, day care centers, and Shabbat morning and Sunday morning programs from at least seven communities. The students are graduates (62%) and undergraduates (38%). During the course of eleven semesters class size has varied from 10 to 21 students, with an average class size of 16. (See Student Profile, Tables 1 and 2.)

Faculty

The author of this report was the founding director of the ECI. At the same time I was also the early childhood consultant for the BJE and thus had a clear sense of the needs of the early childhood community and access to it. The director was responsible for designing the four courses, recruiting students, as well as teaching two of the four courses and hiring faculty to teach the other two courses.

The faculty had a strong background and experience in Early Childhood Jewish Education. The director holds an M.S. degree in Early Childhood Education and has strong Judaic credentials and experience in the field. Another faculty member is concurrently the director of a large Jewish Early Childhood program with experience as a lecturer at a local college. The third faculty member is on the staff of the BJE, specializing in Israel and Hebrew.

Guest lecturers were drawn from the rabbinical community, social work field, general education, etc. These guests lecture on specific fields of expertise, such as child abuse, special needs, child development, etc.

The four courses were designed to address the areas about which we believed that all Early Childhood Jewish professionals ought to be knowledgeable—and comfortable teaching. Beginning with Jewish values sets the stage for serious study of

Judaic text material, which is a new experience for many. Each course, however, can stand alone and therefore students are admitted on a rolling basis, not having to wait for the two-year cycle to end in order to enroll. This system also enables students to choose the individual course(s) from the series.

When it was clear that the founding director would be leaving Boston (in the summer of 1990), plans were put into place for the recruiting and training of a successor. The new director, Susie Rodenstein, was already a faculty member of the ECI and familiar with course structure, format, and the student body. There was a great deal of consultation between the director and new faculty members, including new faculty sitting in on courses taught by the director. Additionally, after the founding director moved, she returned to Boston on a consulting basis and taught a four-session segment of one of the courses with the new faculty member observing.

Advisory Committee

Before the program was initiated, an Advisory Committee was formed. It consisted of the then president of Hebrew College, Dr. Samuel Schafler, z"l; the executive director of the BJE, Dr. Daniel I. Margolis; the early childhood consultant of the BJE; and several early childhood directors and professionals in the field of General Early Childhood Education. The committee discussed the scope, length and format of the program. This vehicle provided further vital support at the inception phase. As the program proceeded successfully, meetings were less frequent. This committee does not currently meet on a regular basis.

Tuition

The budget is based on the premise that students pay one-third of college tuition, the sponsoring school pays one-third, and Hebrew College Scholarship Fund contributes one-third. Each student is also required to pay a $25 college registration fee. Additional scholarship funding is available through Hebrew College.

"The Unplanned Fifth Course"

Eight students graduated in the spring of 1989, participating in the Hebrew College Graduation exercises. As graduation neared, students expressed their desire to continue with their studies as a group. A course was designed in which students met bimonthly for an entire year, receiving 1½ college credits. The course, "Advanced Curriculum Seminar and Lab in Early Childhood Education," had as its focus curricular theory and philosophy and the practical goal of converting students' own final projects from prior course work into a publishable curricular book/unit. A secondary goal was the emergence of a cadre of graduates having increased prestige who would serve as role models.

The BJE curriculum consultant and the ECI director co-taught the course. Five students enrolled. In 1990, the volume, *Milk and Honey: Five Units Integrating Jewish and General Curricula in the Early Childhood Setting*, was produced. It was published, edited, and marketed under the auspices of the BJE Curriculum Department.

Outcomes

Testimony of graduates and Early Childhood directors points to the following outcomes:

1. Teachers who have attended the ECI increase Judaic and Hebrew content in their classrooms.

2. Teachers who have attended the ECI utilize developmentally appropriate Early Childhood Education methodology.

3. Career advancement:

Teachers become directors.

Teachers are promoted within home school.

4. Empowerment and status:

Certificate brings prestige and honor.

Students become workshop presenters at the annual New England Regional Jewish Early Childhood Conference.

Graduates are recognized as honorees at the Conference.

The Early Childhood educators have an increased sense of professionalism.

5. The general lay community has increased awareness of the importance of Early Childhood Jewish education.

6. Professional camaraderie, support, and networking are increased.

7. Some students continue at Hebrew College.

Factors for Success

(Compiled from interviews with Dr. Daniel I. Margolis, executive director, BJE of Greater Boston, and Susie Rodenstein, current institute director.)

1. Community support: Process includes Early Childhood directors' support in planning and recruiting students.

2. Personal and professional traits of institute director:

- strong ego core
- ability to sell and market the program
- ability to delegate
- strong Judaic orientation, credibility
- transdenominational orientation—appeals to entire religious spectrum, "speaks their language" and "honors their needs"
- a solid foundation in early childhood education
- understands and implements adult learning theory; respects student as adult learner
- creates nonjudgmental atmosphere

3. Faculty selected not only for professional know-how and skill in teaching the adult learner, but also for personal qualities.

4. Stability of faculty.

5. Course content:

- exceedingly applicable to work situation, usable
- combination of textual, theoretical, with hands-on
- high level of course (apparent from syllabi, readings, and assignments)
- modeling a high level of professionalism by director and faculty

6. Course Format:

- mostly experiential
- a minimum of lecturing
- group work
- students present, practice, and share know-how
- faculty models teaching techniques

7. Individualization—interview process and ongoing monitoring of individual needs by director and/or faculty.

Summary and Conclusion

Consistent enrollment of 10-21 students from across the religious spectrum over a five-year period points to the ability of the program to meet the educational and professional needs of a diverse group of students. In-depth, ongoing course work

integrating Judaica and Early Childhood education theory leads to increased Judaic content in program. Early Childhood professionals feel more confident and, in some cases, more committed to the Judaic component and to working with parents. Graduates have increased professional status and honor in the community. The ECI experience empowers educators and builds the profession.

The Milwaukee Experience

In August 1991 I became the director of educational services at the Milwaukee Association for Jewish Education (MAJE). Although MAJE does not have an Early Childhood consultant, the Creativity Center administrator, Alice Jacobson, convenes meetings of Early Childhood directors several times a year and offers workshops and other in-service programming. Milwaukee has five early childhood programs serving a population of 425 children and a professional staff of 60. The pool of Early Childhood professionals expands to 120 when including day school kindergarten and primary religious school teachers.

I met with the Early Childhood directors, described the ECI at Hebrew College, and offered to teach one course in the series of four as a pilot. In the past, MAJE offered courses in association with Spertus College of Judaica in Chicago (90 miles away) to religious school teachers, so a precedent for collaboration already existed. Spertus, hearing of the Boston program's success, agreed to co-sponsor the course, "Teaching Jewish Values to Young Children."

I was advised by Milwaukee educators to pare down the course from 14 to 10 weeks and from 2 ½ hours per session to 1 ½ hours. Students would receive 1 ½ credits on either the graduate or undergraduate level and could also audit the course. This arrangement and time sequence coincided with Spertus course offerings and was seen as "more able to attract students."

Student recruitment revolved around the director's encouragement of teachers. There was no tuition since Spertus did not pay salary to the instructor. (The course was part of my work at MAJE.) Recruitment proceeded quite easily. As in Boston, the personal interview was used, and a simple registration form was designed. Sixteen students enrolled from various settings. (See Student Profile, Table 3.)

The pilot course was highly successful. Students and directors requested more courses. As of this writing, the second course is nearing completion, with an enrollment of 15 students from across the religious spectrum. By next year Milwaukee will have its first graduating class of what is now the Institute for Early Childhood Jewish Education. Plans are beginning to emerge for a trip to Israel for prospective graduates.

Comparisons with Boston

Similarities:

- Early Childhood directors' support
- Recruitment procedure
- Institute director's stature, education, and personal qualities
- Course content and format (same syllabi pared down to 10 sessions)
- Transdenominational aspect—appeals to all constituencies
- State requirements in both Wisconsin and Massachusetts encourage continuing education.
- Association with a college of Judaica
- Students in class are energized and empowered. They have developed a bond of camaraderie and support.

- Clear indications that course work is having an impact in the classroom

Differences:

- Course offered in shorter time frame
- No tuition
- Directors serve as ad hoc advisory committee.
- So far, there has been only one faculty member, who is also the institute director.
- In a small community it can be difficult to find qualified faculty.

Recommendations for Replication and Expansion

1. A link to a college of Judaica is not essential (for communities where this is not feasible), although it is a plus for some students.

2. A training seminar for start-up institutes could be convened in either Boston or Milwaukee. Early childhood specialists from different communities would observe the ECI in session and receive training from the institute director.

3. It is preferable to have different faculty for each course (or at least for some of the courses). In small communities, doing this is problematic.

4. The "fifth" course or curriculum publishing/dissemination component should be encouraged.

5. This professional development model could be adapted for Early Childhood directors, religious school teachers, youth leaders, and family educators. (Milwaukee has begun a pilot Teachers' Institute using the ECI model.)

6. Create a "pre-service" program linked with an undergraduate college Department of Education.

Conclusion

The basic structure of the ECI as described is translatable to other communities. The major elements of tone and environment set by the institute director and the crucial role of the facilitative/consultant personality evident in both settings are important factors for success. The high-level course content, together with the practical hands-on component and opportunities for sharing methods and materials, is another major success factor. In this setting, the coming together of educators from the entire religious spectrum for the purpose of improving educational expertise is a model that could well be adapted for other professional groups.

How to Replicate the Early Childhood Institute (ECI) in Ten Steps

1. Develop grass-roots support from Early Childhood directors in your community (after you have established the need).

2. Secure funding for institute director/faculty (if necessary).

3. Hire faculty with:

- Early Childhood credentials.
- transdenominational Judaic orientation and credibility.
- Consultant/facilitative skills and personal characteristics.

4. Set suitable day, time, and place most likely to attract students.

5. Publicize.

6. Recruit—set up application and interview process.

7. Select the first course from model syllabi; adapt or create your own.

8. In first class session:

- set a tone of high professional standards and requirements within a non-threatening environment.
- present material that is relevant to individual students' work settings.

9. Empower teachers by validating their current classroom practice.

10. Create a relaxed setting in which students grow and stretch in both breadth and depth.

Afterword: Be patient. Transformation may not occur until the second or third course.

TABLE 1

BOSTON STUDENT PROFILE:
Educational Background

	Number of Students	Graduates	Undergraduates
Fall 1987	10	6	4
Spring 1988	18	11	7
Fall 1988	18	13	5
Spring 1989	20	13	7
Fall 1989	21	16	5
Spring 1990	20	13	7
Fall 1990	14	10	4
Spring 1991	15	9	6
Fall 1991	14	8	6
Spring 1992	13	7	6
Fall 1992	12	5	7

Graduates 63%

Undergraduates 37%

70 students have taken between one and four courses.

25 students completed four courses and received Certificates.

10 students continued taking courses at Hebrew College in other subject areas.

TABLE 2

BOSTON STUDENT PROFILE:
Affiliation

Fall 1987	10	1	1	4	3	1
Spring 1988	18	2	4	3	5	4
Fall 1988	18	6	3	3	3	3
Spring 1989	20	7	2	2	5	4
Fall 1989	21	7	1	—	5	8
Spring 1990	20	8	2	—	7	3
Fall 1990	14	2	4	1	2	5
Spring 1991	15	3	4	—	1	7
Fall 1991	13	2	6	1	1	3
Spring 1992	13	3	4	1	1	4
Fall 1992	12	3	4	4	1	—

TABLE 3

MILWAUKEE STUDENT PROFILE

Affiliation	Fall 1991	Fall 1992
Orthodox	4	7
Conservative	1	—
Reform	1	1
JCC	4	6
Jewish Family Services (*Day Care*)	6	1
TOTAL NUMBER OF STUDENTS	16	15
College Graduates	7	7
Undergraduates	2	7
Audit	7	1

My Jewish Discovery Place

INFO SHEET

Report By:
Esther Netter

Date:
April, 1993

Program:
My Jewish Discovery Place

Name of the Setting:
Jewish Community Center Association of Greater Los Angeles

Address:
5870 West Olymic Blvd.
Los Angeles, CA 90036

Denominational Affiliation:
All Denominations

Type of Setting:
JCC

Contact Person at Setting:
Esther Netter

Position:
Assistant Director, JCCA/Greater L.A.

Approximate Number of Students:
4300 children

From ages:
3 to 7

Introduction

My Jewish Discovery Place (MJDP) is a hands-on mini-museum where young children and parents can experience together the joy and fun of learning about Jewish history, customs, values, holidays, folklore, tradition, heroes, music, dance and drama, as well as Shabbat, Israel and the Hebrew language, among other things. The interactive displays are designed to transform visitors into participants, offering parents and children a unique opportunity to discover jointly the wonders of their Jewish heritage.

The concept of MJDP was developed by JCC Association of North America, with original funding from the Avi Chai Foundation, for demonstration projects at four centers throughout the United States, which included the Jewish Community Centers Association of Los Angeles. Our museum is currently being funded in part by a grant from the Avi Chai Foundation and the Jewish Community Foundation of Los Angeles.

MJDP has been developed for children between the ages of 3 and 7 and their parents. It has been designed to replicate for the child and the parent experiential learning which has been lost in their daily living as each generation has become more and more assimilated. MJDP is an interactive parent-child learning environment which seeks to promote the participation of parents in the Jewish education of their children and to reinforce living a Jewish life. It also is an excellent learning center for schools and camps. In addition to Jewish schools, the museum is available to non-Jewish private and public schools as a way to reach unaffiliated Jewish children. In this way, the museum also teaches non-Jews about Jewish tradition, culture and history.

Positive meaningful experiences in the exhibits and learning areas are presented on two levels: first, as a series of interactive experiences which introduce children to key elements in Jewish life in a joyful, celebratory manner; and as a teaching resource which instructs and prompts parents/adults, reinforcing and structuring their own Jewish learning. All of the exhibits are designed to recreate complete environments, to transport the museum visitors via their imaginations to other places and times in the past, present and future.

Experimental learning by children, before the intellectual process begins, has a strong impact upon future feelings. Children at an early age learn through the senses: touching, tasting, seeing, hearing and smelling. This learning, when shared by a parent, reinforces the strong emotional influence of the experience. MJDP has been conceived to address the experiential learning of children and the positive reinforcement that ensues when this learning is imparted by the parents.

The Exhibits

The opening exhibits for MJDP offer a wide range of Jewish learning experiences to children and their parents. The museum includes:

Miniature Model Synagogue— complete with Sanctuary, bimah, lectern, ark and Torahs.

Walk Back in Time— 3 different rooms recreating the time of the Exodus from Egypt, including building pyramids, escaping from Egypt, the parting of the Red Sea, wandering in the desert and receiving the Torah at Sinai.

Giant Torah Scroll— 7 ft. x 16 ft. Torah, which includes a child-size ark, Torahs and related activities.

El Al airplane— equipped with navigational tools, electronic control panel, flight simulation trip to Israel and pilot costumes.

Map of Israel— plexiglass map with hidden pictures for imaginary travel throughout the country.

Jerusalem Skyline and Kotel— children and adults write messages and draw pictures to place in the Kotel.

MJDP Reading Center— carefully selected books for children and resource materials for adults will be available. Topics relate to permanent and rotating exhibits and being Jewish in today's world. Books rotate to coincide with Jewish holidays and other timely issues.

Listening Center— specially designed stories and music related to the exhibits.

Genealogy wall— a map of the world and other tools for children and parents to trace their family's journey to America.

Quiz wall— an adaptable self-learning quiz wall which reinforces the themes of the rotating exhibits.

"Shticky city"— over-sized stuffed Jewish symbols, arms, legs and heads which can be combined to create a variety of characters.

Jewish Artifact Rubbing Table— children will discover various Jewish objects by utilizing the Artifact Table.

Activity Center— specially designed Jewish games and arts & crafts projects are available in self-facilitating kits. Activities are related to the museum and exhibits.

Organizational Structure

Designers of creative children's educational games and materials, computer programs and interior designs are consulted, as are the professional staffs of children's museums, teacher resource centers and organizations providing "hands-on" exhibits, in the creation of our museum's exhibits and the educational materials for use at MJDP, at home and in school.

A full-time museum director supervises all part-time staff. The museum director is supervised by the Jewish Education Director of JCCA of Greater Los Angeles. Consultation with the museum's Educational and Artistic Advisory Boards occurs regularly to evaluate, develop and improve exhibits, curricular materials, and family education guides for use in the museum and at home.

There is a MJDP Museum Board of Directors comprised of Jewish educators, early childhood educators, museum educators, artists, parents and lay leaders from the community. Evaluation is done on a regular basis. The community and staff develop Museum assessment tools which are periodically given to parents and schools upon entering the museum and again upon leaving. The document is designed to determine attitudes toward the experience and any changes in the family's attitudes and knowledge. Groups complete forms at each visit. Board members and staff review, critique and improve museum exhibits, materials and publications throughout the year.

Who Uses MJDP?

Since August 1992 over 4,300 children and 1,300 adults have visited MJDP. The entire community, from the unaffiliated to Chabad, have visited MJDP. Groups representing all four movements, Yeshivot, Family Havurot and intermarried support groups visit MJDP. It is seen as an educational resource and creative family experience for the full range of Jewish families. Intermarried couples and Lubavitch couples alike bring their children to learn and play at MJDP. The museum presents all

aspects of Judaism within "halakhic" guidelines. Exhibits conform to accepted religious standards (i.e. tefillin for use by children are not kosher tefillin, a "mehitzah" is provided for optional use in synagogue doll house), but each child and adult can choose how and what he/she will experiment with and learn from the museum.

The Learning Process

MJDP is a "fourth generation" museum— it is self-paced, self-directed and the Jewish learning that takes place is guided by the museum itself and by the adult and child interaction. For the Jewishly knowledgeable, MJDP provides a rich backdrop for discussion and learning. For the Jewish beginner, MJDP gives basic, non-threatening lessons on Jewish history, symbols, culture and tradition.

A full docent program is in place. The first class of docents includes 25 adults and 15 high school students. All have participated in a docent course which includes sessions on Early Childhood, Jewish Family Education, museum education and practical docenting. Both staff and docents are actively engaged in ongoing Jewish learning and MJDP training and serve as role models for parents, teachers and children who visit MJDP. Docents assist families and groups in their utilization of the facility, and are available to coach them towards additional Jewish resources and activities.

The Museum also serves as a resource for referral to other Jewish educational opportunities for family members. The Museum Director and Jewish Education Director experiment with new methods for working with parents, children and schools. Special workshops, lectures and forums are conducted by Jewish educational specialists for museum visitors and the community at large. A special Jewish family event will be held to introduce each new exhibit.

The future of MJDP is full of possibilities as it becomes a cultural arts center for families. Adult-child arts programs, Sunday events, Museum on Wheels, Board study, a MJDP family Israel seminar are all ideas that the Board of Directors is discussing. Working with other ethnic communities in Los Angeles and serving as a model for a cultural children's museum is an additional area of growth for MJDP. Building coalitions amongst the different Jewish organizations and movements, and building relationships with our non-Jewish neighbors, are an outgrowth of people coming together with shared interests in children, education and the arts.

The museum, designed with children in mind, has been a catalyst for adult Jewish learning— parents, grandparents, Board members, docents and patrons. The museum, to enhance and enrich the lives of Jewish families, has reached the non-Jewish community as well. The museum, while designed for parents and children to learn together, has become an invaluable resource for schools, centers, synagogues and camps by providing arts programs and museum educational experiences.

MJDP is a new model of Jewish education for children and families that is easily replicable in other communities. It would succeed in a variety of formats both smaller or larger, depending on a community's resources and space availability. A Jewish children's museum builds on educational concepts that succeed. Like an Israel experience or a summer camp experience, creating a total Jewish environment, even if just for a Sunday afternoon, affords a child and adult the opportunity to step into a different place in a different time and imagine, touch and learn.

CIJE Council for Initiatives in Jewish Education